PURE POTENTIALITY

A Dissection of Gender and Sexuality in Re-Animator and Bride of Re-Animator

Alexandria (Xandy) Baird Hurley

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Abstract

This thesis examines subtextual depictions of queerness in the films *Re-Animator* (1985) and *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990). Through close textual analysis, image analysis, cultural analysis, and archival research, it argues that both films utilize body horror, dark comedy, and medical settings themselves to explore and depict transgressive forms of intimacy and desire. This project looks to break down these films in a thorough but accessible way. Furthermore, it argues that these under-examined, stereotypically trashy films contain a not insubstantial depth, and are worth considerable academic merit, particularly in the fields of queer studies, media studies, and particularly queer horror studies.

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Introduction

On July 8th, 1822, Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned when his boat, the Don Juan, encountered an unexpected storm while sailing off the coast of Italy. Several days later, when his body washed up on shore, he was subsequently identified by friends, and cremated. The only part of him to survive the process was his heart, thereafter gifted to his widow, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley. She had not been present for the funeral, only learning about his death and cremation after the fact. The woman who had written *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus* at just nineteen would keep her husband's heart for the rest of her life, in a box wrapped in silk, alongside one of her husband's poems and mementos of their deceased children.

A century later, American horror author Howard Phillip Lovecraft would draw heavily on (some might say flagrantly rip-off) *Frankenstein* for his first published work, "Herbert West—Reanimator." Unpopular in his lifetime, as many of his works were, the story would go on to inspire one of the most beloved and influential science fiction cult classics of the late 20th century. The film eventually became a series, spinning off into two sequel movies, as well as a not-inconsiderable amount of supplementary material. One of those sequels, *Bride of Re-Animator*, contains a pivotal and interesting scene: Herbert West, our Victor-Frankenstein-esque mad scientist, reveals to his assistant Dan Cain that he has pilfered the heart of Dan's deceased girlfriend. As Dan threatens to leave, fed up with the horrors he has witnessed, West produces the organ, holding it out in front of him, and asks, "What was it about [your girlfriend] that you loved?"

The scene is strikingly intimate, in a way ironically more befitting of *Frankenstein* than the original *Re-Animator* novella. It belies how deeply the characters understand—or manipulate—each other. The invoking of the anatomical heart colors this scene, and creates a subtextual

connection to the sad, appropriately gothic life of Mary Shelley. It is also, undeniably, a highly coded interaction.

Within the medical horror subgenre, filmmakers frequently utilize the intimate access afforded to doctors, leveraging their proximity to bodies, boundaries, and forbidden knowledge, as a way to explore desire, identity, and transgressive intimacy. In an environment where two characters cannot consummate their relationship, for whatever reason, the presence of bodies and medical procedures such as surgery may act as a sort of proxy to the act of sex. It is these interactions and the subtext behind them that I wish to explore. Through my work, I intent to examine how these movies—*Re-Animator* (1985) and *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990)—depict gender and sexuality, and how they utilize these depictions to explore and comment on queer desire, identity, and transgressive intimacy.

As much of my research is theory-based, my methodology largely involves creating and utilizing theoretical frameworks through which to examine these films and their influences, though I am looking to back up much of my theoretical work with historical and cultural theory, in order to properly contextualize these works. My research plan largely involves going over the individual texts I have collected extensively, reviewing them, and in some cases discussing them with their original authors to formulate a strong basis of academic queer horror theory. I'll then go back over my selected films, reviewing and analyzing them through said theory.

In order to do this, I will largely be focusing on textual, narrative, and image analysis of these films, as well as factoring in some degree of historical context—reading contemporary reviews, novelizations, and fan works (such as zines and newsletters) to get a solid grasp not only on how these films are perceived currently, in retrospect, but how they and their subtext were viewed at the time of their release.

Interstitial: Textual Origins and History

“Herbert West—Reanimator” was not popular at the time of its release. Then again, few of H. P. Lovecraft's stories were.

It was received, at the time of its publishing, lukewarmly, and to this day is considered a lesser entry in Lovecraft's bibliography. Prior to its well-known film adaptation, many fans considered it to be largely of note insofar as it’s containing the earliest in-print references to Lovecraft's famous Miskatonic University, a fictional reoccurring location which would appear in several of the author’s notable later works. Lovecraft himself was purportedly dissatisfied with the story, admitting to its being a rip-off of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which he largely wrote for monetary reasons.

The story is narrated by an unnamed assistant to the Victor Frankenstein-esque Dr. Herbert West—a choice likely made due to Lovecraft’s well-known discomfort with writing in third person. West is the inventor of a mysterious serum, referred to as his “reagent,” which brings the dead back to life. However, it is imperfect; reanimated persons often return as mindless, rage-filled zombies. Whether this is because the reagent provides only animus to the body but does not return the soul, à la *Pet Sematary*, death fundamentally changes the human brain, or West’s work is in actuality just not up to snuff, is unclear. Over the course of several years, possibly decades, the Assistant follows Herbert West through multiple living situations, jobs, and even to different countries in the attempt to perfect his reagent.

Much like Lovecraft’s novella, the author himself was largely unappreciated within his lifetime, contrary to his current reputation as a giant of American horror fiction. He rarely, if ever, worked consistently, living primarily off of family money. It would only be posthumously, through

reprints and short story collections and the tireless work of his friends and fans, that he would come to be known as a master of horror fiction.

Lovecraft's influence and popularity proliferated slowly in the decades following his death. The earliest on-screen adaptation of his work came in 1963, with the Roger Corman film *The Haunted Palace*, starring Vincent Price. Based on Lovecraft's short story *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, the film was technically made as part of Roger Corman's Poe Cycle, a series of films based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe. To quote horror film historian Robin Bailes: "[...]Wary of getting into a rut, Corman now rejected AIP's [1] calls for another Poe adaptation to focus on *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward.* [...] But AIP retitled the film *The Haunted Palace*, feeling that Edgar Allan Poe was too valuable in name not to exploit." (2023, 24:25)

Over the next two decades, references to Lovecraft's œuvre intensifies, as his popularity expands within horror circles—*The Evil Dead*'s inclusion of Lovecraft's infamous Necronomicon, H. R. Giger's Lovecraft-influenced biomechanical designs for the *Alien* films, Italian director Lucio Fulci's repeated references to Lovecraft's beloved Arkham, Massachusetts within his *Gates of Hell* trilogy. It is within this boom of popularity that controversial Chicago-based theatre director and activist Stuart Gordon gets the idea to adapt Lovecraft's "Herbert West—Reanimator" for film.

Perhaps fittingly, given our *Frankenstein* connection, he got the idea from some friends at a party. While discussing the dearth of *Dracula* film adaptations and lack of *Frankenstein* ones, a friend of Gordon's (uncredited to this day), recommended that he read "Reanimator," thinking that it's shorter length and Frankenstein-esque atmosphere would make for a good play. Gordon

[1] American International Pictures, film production company.

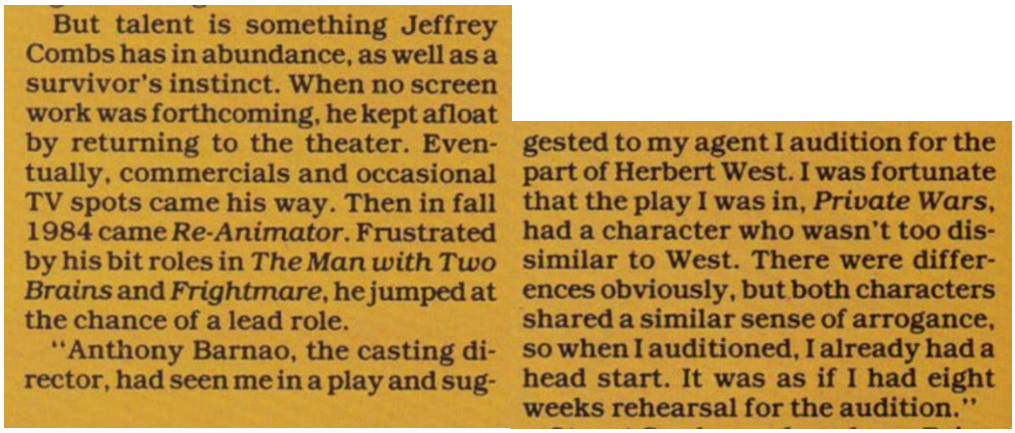
did and instantly fell in love with the work. Over the next several years, he, along with frequent collaborator Dennis Paoli, would make various attempts at adapting the novella—initially as a stage play, then as a television pilot, and finally as a film. Early efforts were made to hue closer to Lovecraft's original vision, setting the narrative around the turn of the century. But these proved too difficult for the budgets and constraints Gordon was accustomed to. Eventually, Gordon would be put in touch with the man who would act as the film's entire lynchpin—producer Brian Yuzna.

The two men made an odd pair. Where Gordon had by this point lead a long, storied career as a director of controversial, politically-motivated theater in the Chicago area, Yuzna was an up-and-comer in Hollywood, eventually to become known as producer, writer, and director of many sexually taboo, body horror-centric films. And yet, while it's easy to imagine Yuzna as a Dennis-Quaid-in-The-Substance-esque pervy Hollywood type, he'd arguably do the most to help *Re-Animator* come together as a whole, workable film. Most notably, Yuzna would put Gordon in touch with producer and head of Empire Pictures, Charles Band. Together, the three would work out a funding and distribution deal—certainly a far shakier and more slapdash route than what had been taken at Universal.

The film was headlined by Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, and Barbara Crampton, a motley crew of young actors, still relatively unknown at this time. But likely the most notable was the film's leading man, Jeffrey Combs.

Unlike many of the rest of the cast, who largely came from TV backgrounds, Combs got his start in the theater. He was specifically scouted for *Re-Animator* by casting director Anthony Barnao, after seeing him in a one act play about Vietnam Veterans, *Private Wars.*

Figure 1. Combs pictured bottom right, LA Weekly, September 1984 (Mikulan 1984, 114)



But talent is something Jeffrey Combs has in abundance, as well as a survivor's instinct. When no screen work was forthcoming, he kept afloat by returning to the theater. Eventually, commercials and occasional TV spots came his way. Then in fall 1984 came *Re-Animator*. Frustrated by his bit roles in *The Man with Two Brains* and *Frightmare*, he jumped at the chance of a lead role.

"Anthony Barnao, the casting director, had seen me in a play and suggested to my agent I audition for the part of Herbert West. I was fortunate that the play I was in, *Private Wars*, had a character who wasn't too dissimilar to West. There were differences obviously, but both characters shared a similar sense of arrogance, so when I auditioned, I already had a head start. It was as if I had eight weeks rehearsal for the audition."

Figure 2. Interview with Jeffrey Combs, Fangoria #61 (1987, 28)

This ragtag team of novice actors gave the memorable performances that made *Re-Animator* what it is today. And yet, it was arguably this far more ramshackle, messy production history which allowed the film to take big swings—swings that would result not just in a wonderfully entertaining and unique little horror movie, but one with some fascinating and unique subtextual dimensions.

In many ways, Dan Cain and Herbert West's relationship falls under what media theorist Eve Sedgwick would define as the "Paranoid Gothic," which, in her essay *The Epistemology of the*

Closet, Sedgwick defines as "[media] in which a male hero is in a close, usually murderous relation to another male figure, in some respects his "double," to whom he seems to be mentally transparent," (1986). Relationships of this nature show up in many horror films within the subgenre of "medical horror", as intimacy bred by the exclusive fraternity of medical knowledge is often most easily showcased through doubles, doppelgangers, and foils—Frankenstein and Pretorius in the original Universal films, as well as Beverly and Elliot Mantel in *Dead Ringers* (1988), Nelson Wright and David Labraccio in *Flatliners* (1990), and Cecile and Rose in *Birth/ReBirth* (2022). Though, discussing the homoerotic and homosocial nature of the *Re-Animator* films is not as simple as discussing that of, say, the Universal *Frankenstein* films. With *Frankenstein*, not only are there highly visible and easily digestible examples both in front of and behind the camera, but much of it has been recorded and discussed by academics in thorough depth. But this series is different—low budget, cult favorite movies. While *Re-Animator* has been undeniably influential on later science fiction and medical horror, little scholarship has been penned about the film or its sequels. Furthermore, while *Re-Animator*'s sense of homoerotic tension, as well as its complex relationships to gender, is incredibly vivid and self-evident on screen, this was largely unintended by the cast and crew. There is no James Whale or Ernest Thesiger here, imbuing the material with lived homosexual experiences. As such, discussing these dimensions requires viewing them through a highly specific lense, implementing what media and cultural theorist Stuart Hall refers to as decoding.

Hall was highly critical of the idea that media delivered information in a sort of linear manner—that creatives instilled a level of meaning into their work, which would subsequently be sent straight into the waiting, consuming maw of its audience. Instead, Hall posited that audiences themselves created a dimension of meaning through their engagement with media:

> Traditionally, mass-communications research has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit or loop. This model has been criticized for its linearity – sender/message/receiver – for its concentration on the level of message exchange and for the absence of a structured conception of the different moments as a complex structure of relations. But it is also possible (and useful) to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction. This would be to think of the process as a 'complex structure in dominance', sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence. (1980, 163)

It wasn't until fairly recently that the *Re-Animator* films garnered a reputation as queer-coded horror classics of the 1980s, alongside such contemporaries as *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* and *Sleepaway Camp*. While those who have long orbited the films can tell you that there have always been jokes, and references to the idea that the films have a certain vibe, these ideas were rarely entertained seriously—or if they were, those discussions have not been properly recorded.

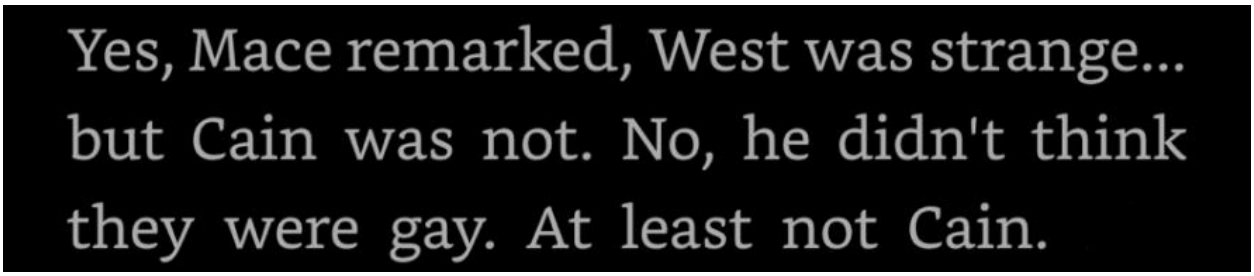


Figure 3. Re-Animator novelization *(Rovin 1986, 112)*

However, through the advent of the internet, we begin to see some more open discussion of the film's homoerotic dimensions taking place—early works of fanfiction on sites like FanFiction.net, scattered discussions across private, horror-centric chat rooms and message boards, one or two early articles like "Together, We Are Providence," by a user named drworm on LiveJournal-based online journaling service Dreamwidth. For many years, these discussions

remained fairly niche, until around 2015—when *Re-Animator* celebrated its 30th anniversary. The type of screenings, profiles, and actor Q&A's which often surround major anniversaries, particularly for beloved cult classic films (a status which by this point *Re-Animator* had thoroughly earned), would likely have brought it to the attention of younger horror fans—fans in their 20s and 30s, who wouldn't have been alive or old enough to see the film upon its initial release. It is around this time that we begin to see the number of works on fan fiction sites like FF.net and Archive of Our Own really pick up. Following this, we see another major jump in 2020, when the film series is covered by extremely popular YouTube Channel/podcast Dead Meat. Sitting at 6.95 million followers (at the time of this writing), the channel has a reputation for covering a wide array of horror films in an accessible manner.

The combination of both these fairly high-profile events likely helped bring the films to a younger Millennial/Gen Z audience, and from that point forward, spread through word of mouth to more fan-oriented social media sites like Tumblr, TikTok, and Reddit. It seems to be here, when younger, more progressive, and in many cases more queer fans watched the film for the first time, that the film garnered its current reputation as being particularly coded.

The films went from having, on average, a rate of roughly 12.2 published fan writings per year, between 2010 and 2015, to roughly 157.67 from 2016 to now. And while that may not sound like much in comparison to concurrent, highly popular fandoms, it is a notably well-sized community for a low budget sci-fi medical horror from the 1980s.

Outside of merely conventional fan fiction, searches of Tumblr, TikTok, and Reddit produce a plethora of fan made content, in the form of both academic and informal discussions of the films, edited compilations of notable scenes from the movies, fan cams, fan art, and physically made fan media like zines, collectables, and custom clothing.

This particular kind of explosion in popularity has resulted in an unprecedented number of people reading the film in a way it was not intended to be read. And at a certain point, particularly on social media sites, this results in interpretations feeding into one another, piling on top of one another, compounding each other, creating entire communities who approach these films with a distinctly queer eye. However, I do not wish to obfuscate or distract from what I said previously—while this increase in attention has resulted in far more people approaching the films with a specific reading in mind, that reading still has to have come from somewhere.

But to discuss that in more depth, we must discuss the films themselves.

Re-Animator (1985)

Birth is always painful.

The Duality of Man

Our film opens with dual introductory scenes—one establishing the central character of Herbert West, and one establishing our Assistant protagonist, who for the film receives an actual name: Dan Cain. These scenes not only introduce us to our protagonists but establish each character's unique sense of self and their social context.

We open on an establishing shot of the University of Zürich Medical College. Inside, a pair of professors and security guards break down a locked door and find a nervous, disheveled Herbert West (played by Jeffrey Combs), kneeling over a thrashing, writhing body. As he's pulled away, he screams, "Don't, you idiots, you'll ruin my notes!" The man on the ground, who has been unconscious up to this point, shoot up, screaming, eyes bulging grotesquely. The ensemble falls back in shock, as the man's eyes explode out of his head, showering everyone in spurts of blood, before collapsing to the ground, still. When the professors accuse Herbert West of killing the man, he responds "No, I didn't!... I gave him life." Hard cut to black, as the blaring, bleating synth chords of the film's main theme begins to play (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985).

Following the opening credits, we cut to a hospital interior at Miskatonic University, where third-year medical student, Dan Cain (played by Bruce Abbott), is attempting to resuscitate a flatlining woman. Despite the clear lack of viability, Dan has to be convinced to stop performing chest compressions. He's pulled aside by his instructor, Dr. Harrod (played by director Stuart Gordon's wife, Carolyn Purdy-Gordon) and informed that while he's an incredibly talented

student, his unwillingness to let a clearly dying patient go, even to their own detriment or comfort, is a flaw he must work through.

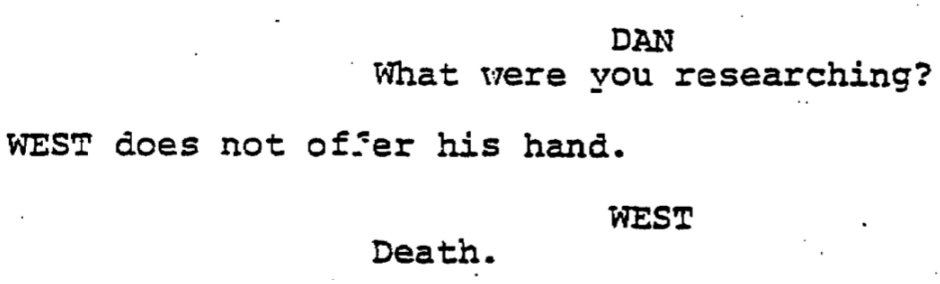
While, from a horror perspective, these scenes are impressively succinct in their establishment of tone and theme, they also do a tremendous job of setting up Dan and Herbert as characters. In contrast to his novella counterpart, *Re-Animator*'s Dan Cain is defined by his affability and charisma, respected by his colleagues and beloved by his peers. Actor Bruce Abbott seems almost to have wandered onto set from a medical soap opera, where he was meant to play the hunky doctor. This image is rounded out by the presence of a love interest, invented whole-cloth for the film; Meg Halsey (whom we will discuss in more detail later). In short, Dan is established as the very ideal of American masculinity: competent, clean-cut, and of course, heterosexual.

By contrast, Herbert West is established immediately as an outsider. He is dry, prickly in his disposition. He routinely talks down to others in a catty, snippy sort of way, only ever truly coming alive (if you'll pardon the pun) when discussing his work. It is apparent from the onset that he is used to being regarded with suspicion and disdain. He is still very much the mad scientist of Lovecraft's novella, but with a more clearly defined personal identity that puts him at odds with the "normal world." While still decidedly masculine, the fact that West exists on the fringes of, if not society, then certainly, convention allows more opportunity for queer interpretation.

West's interiority comes not so much from Lovecraft—who seemed to view the character as little more than a plot device with the words "mad scientist archetype here" scrawled upon it—but from actor Jeffrey Combs. Combs imbues Herbert West with a number of idiosyncrasies and identifiable habits: he moves stiffly, but dramatically; his shoulders hardly ever relax—except for when he's working on his reagent. Combs's delivery when Herbert discusses medical matters

is highly authoritative, but anytime the character is pushed to have an interpersonal interaction, particularly with someone he's not comfortable with, he'll stutter and place strange inflections on words, subtextually indicating someone who is not used to casual conversation. It is these details that turn the film's Herbert West into a highly realized, vivid character.

Shortly after the film's opening, we get to see how these on-screen personas directly contrast. Dan is tasked by his professor with taking the deceased woman he could not save down to the hospital's morgue. There he runs into the school's dean, Alan Halsey, as well as the newly arrived Herbert West. In essence, this is almost *Re-Animator*'s "meet cute." Immediately, there is a visual juxtaposition between the two, one which creates a strange, palpable energy. While Dan is positioned as a good medical student and personable individual, Herbert is characterized as a brilliant scientist, but socially cold and closed off. Dan wears sweaty, well-worn scrubs. Herbert wears a full suit and peacoat. When Dan goes to shake Herbert's hand, he deftly slides past, refusing to make eye contact.



DAN
What were you researching?

WEST does not offer his hand.

WEST
Death.

Figure 4. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

This initial meeting between the two highlights the differences in their characters: while Dan is incredibly affable but questioning his abilities as a doctor, Herbert is hyper-competent but anti-social. In seeing them together, it is clear that the narrative is pushing them towards each other; in a sense, they complement each other. Where Dan is haunted by the patients he can't save, Herbert has found a way to bring the dead back to life. Where Herbert has trouble

communicating his findings—indeed, communicating in general—to his peers, Dan socializes with ease.

The exchange is interrupted by Doctor Carl Hill, the film's originally created antagonist. He pulls Dean Halsey away to commiserate, and the camera specifically chooses to position the two older gentlemen in the background, with Herbert West and Dan Cain in the foreground, bracketing either side of them. As Halsey and Hill discuss business, Dan and Herbert share a long, strangely charged glance.

While this shot was ultimately practical in nature, Gordon attempting to fit all of his actors into frame while not catching any of the crew members crammed into the small morgue set, the choice to specifically frame our two central characters this way ends up being quite emotionally furtive. The mis-en-scene indicates to us as an audience a sort of shared connection between the two—these men stand on the same side of an invisible line, othered together, in a way they themselves may not even recognize yet.

Figure 5. Herbert (Jeffrey Combs), Dean Halsey (Robert Sampson), Dr. Hill (David Gale), and Dan (Bruce Abbott) (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

The Third Wheel

We are then formally introduced to Dan's girlfriend Meg, played by soap opera actress Barbara Crampton. Meg is a bright, bubbly blonde, with an almost Betty-from-Archie-Comics-girl-next-door quality to her. Together, the two are so much the image of an all-American couple that it's almost uncanny. We meet Meg in a somewhat comedic edit—Dan childishly pestering her with kisses as she giggles and goes "No, no!", only for the film to hard-cut to the two having sex in bed, Megan moaning, "Yes, yes!"

In the aftermath of this sexual encounter, we received some key exposition about the nature of their relationship. Dan is enthusiastic to get engaged, but Megan's father, Dean Halsey, is overprotective and Meg wants to wait until after Dan has finished his medical degree to discuss marriage, which she believes will make selling the prospect to her father easier. The conversation devolves into the two chasing each other around the house in a playful manner. Meg eventually runs to the front door, opening it only to find Herbert West standing on the porch. As he holds up Dan's notice looking for a new roommate, Dan humorously moves to cover his chest, Herbert's eyes flicking up and down his form.

Again, the imagery here is not especially subtle—Herbert West, looming on the doorstep like a vampire waiting to be invited into a home. A distinctly outside specter menacing the young, happy couple, intruding upon them during a moment of intimacy. While it's worth restating that these undertones were, again, not intended by the film's cast and crew, the subtext of this scene very much falls in line with conventional queer-coded horror tropes. To quote Harry M. Benshoff's *Monsters in the Closet*, "The monstrously queer deviation of the gothic villain is also clearly marked within the text by the presence of an assertively 'normal' heterosexualized couple, who serve as the center of a naturalized and normative heterosexual equilibrium which

the queer force disrupts," (1997, 36). Like *Bride of Frankenstein*'s Doctor Pretorius, Herbert West is an androgynous menacing specter; his openly ogling Dan suggests a homoerotic desire and establishes him as a human disruption to Dan and Meg's peace.

Dan allows Herbert inside to take a look around, despite the lateness of the hour and immense awkwardness of the situation. Herbert is transparently giddy about the off-campus house with a basement, and despite Megan's clear discomfort with the situation, his willingness to pay rent upfront in cash is more than enough to sway Dan.

MEG
You didn't say why you left Switzerland.

WEST
There was no more I could learn there.

MEG gives DAN an ironic look.

WEST
Do we have a deal?

DAN takes the money.

DAN
Done.

WEST
(to MEG)
Done.

Figure 6. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

It should be noted here how almost violently stilted the exchanges between Herbert and Meg are, particularly because actors Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton would go on to appear alongside each other in numerous films following this, often playing couples. The first of which would come just a year after *Re-Animator* in another Lovecraft adaptation, *From Beyond* (1986), also directed by Stuart Gordon.

Figure 7. Combs and Crampton (Gordon, From Beyond 1986)

So we know that this awkwardness doesn't come from a lack of actor chemistry—it is a conscious character choice. Herbert seemingly has no desire to bridge any emotional gaps with Meg, and despite the fact that he barely knows her, already seems to regard her as more of an obstacle than a peer. Even his choice to direct “Done,” at her as opposed to Dan feels distinctly catty, particularly given that the two have said less than fifteen words to each other. It will only get worse from here.

It should then be unsurprising that Meg’s palpable discomfort with Herbert’s presence persists. In subsequent scenes, it gets to the point where she’s visibly unenthused at the idea of having sex in Dan's house, even when Herbert isn't home. This eventually leads to an argument between her and Dan.

MEG
He's always in his room, with the door closed. Does he ever eat? Do you ever see him?

DAN
I told you. He's a little cracked.

MEG
He bothers you, too.

DAN
Don't be ridiculous.

MEG
Rufus is terrified of him. When West comes in, he runs and hides.

Figure 8. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

This exchange is notable for a few reasons. During the earlier scene where Dan and Meg discussed marriage, there's an exchange (included in the film's script and extended cut) where Dan asks Meg to move in with him. She refuses, arguing that her father would never approve of it. During this argument, Dan attempts to counter her discomfort with Herbert by pointing out that if she isn't going to live with him, he needs *someone* to help pay the rent. This intrinsically frames Herbert's living with Dan as a sort of answer to Meg's refusal, a subtextual rebound.

More importantly though, this argument establishes a precedent which will pervade throughout the rest of the film—while we, the audience, are aware of the present danger surrounding Herbert West, Dan is not. As far as he's concerned, Herbert is an acquaintance who's done him no harm, and Meg's feelings about him seem erroneous and silly.

Time and time again, people in Dan's life will make what seem to be hyperbolic or overly accusatory criticisms of Herbert West—sometimes valid, but equally as often not. Ironically, a consequence of this is that it ends up unintentionally making Herbert look far more reasonable to

Dan, a victim of baseless attacks. It will repeatedly put Dan on the back foot of defending Herbert to other people, pushing him further and further into the other man's sphere of influence. As Jeffrey Combs appropriately jokes to Bruce Abbott during in the commentary track for this scene “See, you're already defending me, that’s what I love!” (Combs, Abbott and Crampton, et al. [1995]).

The exchange is additionally notable as it is in reference to the attitude of Dan and Meg’s cat, Rufus. His being referenced here makes Meg suddenly paranoid, as she realizes she hasn't seen him all evening. The two begin searching the house for their cat, and eventually, getting a bad feeling, Meg decides to check Herbert’s bedroom. Therein, she finds the deceased Rufus—inside Herbert's mini-fridge.

Figure 9. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

Herbert's excuses as to why he’s hiding their dead pet in his bedroom are transparently ridiculous and flimsy, but he delivers them confidently enough to again put Dan on the back foot. Once

again, the shot composition here is highly interesting—Gordon choosing to frame Herbert in between Dan and Meg. While the couple are on the same side, both emotionally and on the aforementioned invisible line, Herbert is already coming between them, serving as an increasingly insurmountable wall in their relationship. And what's more, Gordon will retain this shot composition for subsequent scenes of Meg, Dan, and Herbert arguing, even during instances where Dan and Herbert are on the same side, emotionally. Besides the body of Rufus, Dan also finds a vial of Herbert's reagent, which Herbert possessively snatches away and hides in his coat pocket.

WEST
Just as it's none of my business that you're sleeping with Dean Halsey's daughter. I wouldn't want to see a fellow student, especially one as promising as yourself, thrown out of school - out of the profession - on moral grounds.

DAN rises, angry.

DAN
This is 1984. Dr. Halsey will understand.

WEST
You may be right. Are you sure you want to find out?

MEG steps between them.

MEG
Dan, don't! He's right. It's your life. You know how Daddy is. He could kill your scholarship.

Figure 10. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

Dan is angry enough that he wants Herbert out of the house immediately, but Herbert points out that he does have some leverage in this situation—were he to inform Dean Halsey that Dan is sleeping with his daughter, it would almost certainly hurt Dan's academic career. Again, herein Herbert is framed as an almost existential threat to the couple, menacing their very sense of

stability both from within (sowing strife between the two) and from without (invoking the external threat of Megan's over-protective father). To return to Benshoff, "Films such as The Boston Strangler (1968) demonstrated that 'real-life' psychosexual deviants were far more terrifying and posed a much more 'real' threat to society than did mad scientists or teenage werewolves," (1997, 176). Small, effete, spooky Herbert West is, like Dr. Pretorious, both the real-life psychosexual deviant and the mad scientist, the two concepts intertwined in the threat he poses.

Seemingly, Dan Cain has picked up on this as well, albeit subconsciously. In the film's script, this scene immediately cuts to a fake-out dream sequence, initially framed as a scene set the next day. Dan stumbles upon Herbert, Dean Halsey, and Doctor Hill arguing in the morgue about the viability of West's reagent. Herbert offers to showcase it for them, pulling the sheet off a nearby operating table to reveal a somehow deceased Meg Halsey. Herbert injects her with reagent, bringing her to life—a moment as erotic as it is horrifying.

Her head turns and her shoulders rise a little off the table. She whimpers again. Her head turns back the other way and her whole body begins to writhe gently, alluringly. Her whimper breaks into a groan. DAN is fascinated.

WEST
She's hungry for it. Soon, she'll be mad for it.

Her back arches off the table; her arms rise, hands spread, to DAN. Her groan takes a distinct shape.

MEG
D-A-N. D-A-A-N.

HALSEY
Then it's true. It's all true.
(to DAN)
And it's all your fault.

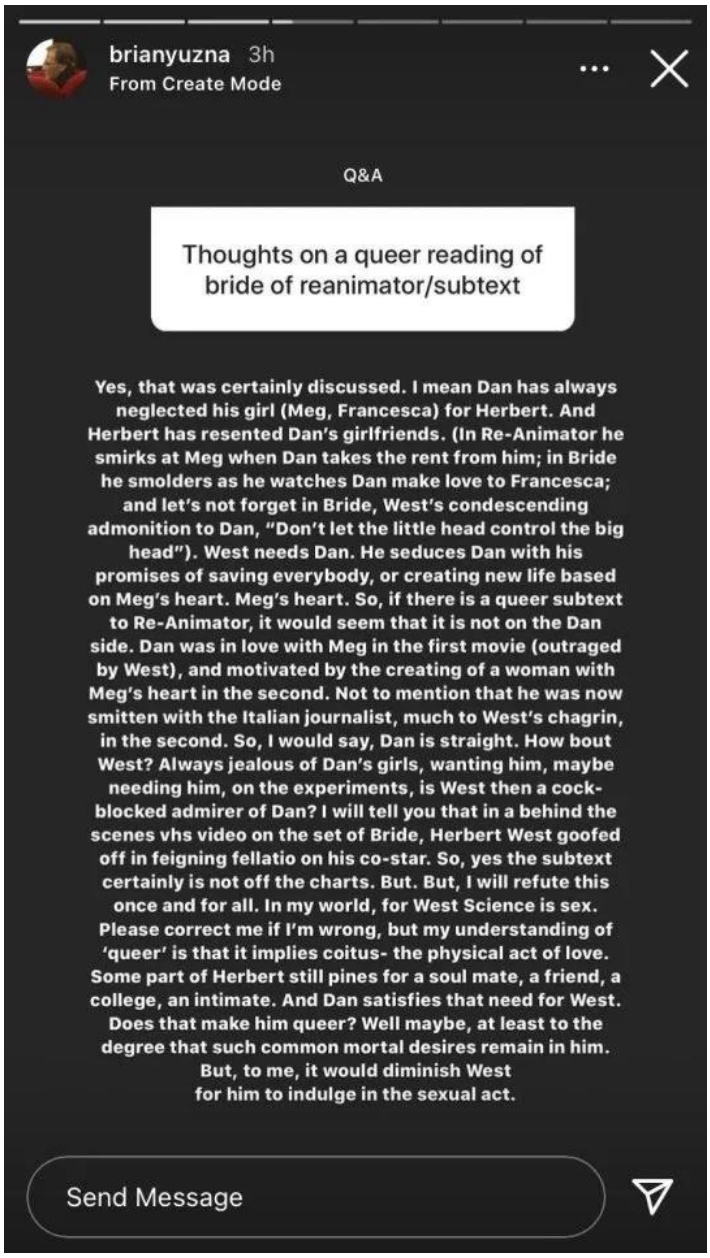
DAN shakes his head but is still unable to speak. Suddenly the body begins to writhe more quickly, spasmodically. The groan becomes louder and louder until it is a terrible scream. WEST is laughing, but soon all DAN can hear is the scream. He closes his eyes and covers his ears, but the scream grows inhumanly terrifying.

INT. NIGHT - DAN'S BEDROOM

Figure 11. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

While the scene was shot, it was ultimately cut from the final film. In hindsight, it seems slightly obvious why—Dan does not yet know about Herbert's ability to revive the dead. However, I would argue that the sequence is still notable to any discussion of sexuality within the *Re-Animator* series.

As showcased previously in the film's novelization, while many involved in the making of *Re-Animator* have been open to acknowledging that Herbert West, as a small, not-conventionally-masculine villain, reads as queer, there's often a hesitancy to say the same for Dan Cain. Most notably, in an online Q&A, producer Brian Yuzna said "... [I]f there is a queer subtext to *Re-Animator*, it would seem that it is not on Dan's side."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Q&A
Thoughts on a queer reading of bride of reanimator/subtext
Yes, that was certainly discussed. I mean Dan has always neglected his girl (Meg, Francesca) for Herbert. And Herbert has resented Dan's girlfriends. (In Re-Animator he smirks at Meg when Dan takes the rent from him; in Bride he smolders as he watches Dan make love to Francesca; and let's not forget in Bride, West's condescending admonition to Dan, "Don't let the little head control the big head"). West needs Dan. He seduces Dan with his promises of saving everybody, or creating new life based on Meg's heart. Meg's heart. So, if there is a queer subtext to Re-Animator, it would seem that it is not on the Dan side. Dan was in love with Meg in the first movie (outraged by West), and motivated by the creating of a woman with Meg's heart in the second. Not to mention that he was now smitten with the Italian journalist, much to West's chagrin, in the second. So, I would say, Dan is straight. How bout West? Always jealous of Dan's girls, wanting him, maybe needing him, on the experiments, is West then a cock-blocked admirer of Dan? I will tell you that in a behind the scenes vhs video on the set of Bride, Herbert West goofed off in feigning fellatio on his co-star. So, yes the subtext certainly is not off the charts. But. But, I will refute this once and for all. In my world, for West Science is sex. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding of 'queer' is that it implies coitus- the physical act of love. Some part of Herbert still pines for a soul mate, a friend, a college, an intimate. And Dan satisfies that need for West. Does that make him queer? Well maybe, at least to the degree that such common mortal desires remain in him. But, to me, it would diminish West for him to indulge in the sexual act.
Send Message

Figure 12. Instagram Q&A (Yuzna 2021)

In their essay "Parasites and Perverts: Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity," written for the book *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, author J. Halberstam writes "The production of sexuality as identity and as the inversion of identity (perversion—a turning away from identity) in Gothic novels consolidates normal sexuality by defining it in contrast to its monstrous manifestations." Halberstam asserts that the positioning of monsters or monstrous

figures in horror as “outsiders” often aligns them with historically othered people—Jewish, Black, and of course, queer. The author posits that the queer-coding of villains like Buffalo Bill in *Silence of the Lambs*, characters who display a sort of “monstrous sexuality and gender” help to confirm the audience’s pre-existing biases (2006, 12).

It is easy, in scenes like that previously discussed, to view Dan Cain as a sort of inversion of West, the normal sexuality contrasted by the monstrous sexuality. Dan's positioning as an every-man protagonist, particularly one with a female partner, certainly makes this easy. It mimics a history of fiendish queers lusting after and manipulating their heterosexual associates—Pretorius and Frankenstein, Bruno and Guy in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), Dr. Frankfurter and Brad Majors in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). But it's worth acknowledging that Dan frequently, sometimes unprompted, chooses to side with Herbert. While yes, he is certainly being manipulated in this endeavor, to argue that Dan Cain is little more than a brainless vessel of red-blooded heterosexuality is to ignore the character's depth and sense of agency. Furthermore, I would argue that things like this highly erotically charged dream sequence indicate at the very least a subconscious sexual curiosity towards Herbert West. Yes, Megan Halsey is very present and very naked herein, but it’s Herbert who’s the one being focused on, the one literally whispering “She’s hungry for it, soon she’ll be mad for it...” seductively in Dan’s ear. Meg’s sexual presence in the scene feels almost more like Dan’s own mind is attempting to provide a sense of plausible deniability. If a man viewing straight pornography spends the entire time watching the male performer, who is any the wiser, save the viewer himself?

Figure 13. (Gordon, Re-Animator Deleted Scenes 1985)

In the film's final edit, we merely get an exterior shot of Dan and Herbert home to indicate some passage of time. Presumably later that evening, after the argument, Dan is awoken by a loud, mysterious sound coming from the basement. He goes to investigate, and we get our first real turning point in the film—both narratively and emotionally.

In the basement, Dan finds Herbert wrestling with a reanimated Rufus. Before he even seems to comprehend the situation, Dan rushes in to assist. Wordlessly the two men fall into a sort of sync with each other, awkwardly but cohesively chasing the small animal through Herbert's cluttered makeshift laboratory. Eventually Dan is able to get hold of Rufus and flings the cat against a wall, killing it a second time. After all is said and done, they stand together in silence, as the script puts it, "The quiet is broken only by their hard breathing. The two men look at each other, wracked and spent," (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984, 34). The re-killing of the cat serves as a sort of allegorical consummation of the relationship—a mutual act, which leaves Dan and

Herbert panting and sweating but ultimately bound together. Now, a new Rubicon has been crossed.

Befittingly, the following scene sees an immediate, visible change in the pair's relationship. As Herbert West attempts to explain his reagent, his motivations and processes to Dan, the two men who up until now have never physically touched sit shoulder to shoulder. As opposed to their first meeting where Herbert refused to shake Dan's hand, here he spends much of the scene almost aggressively leaning into Dan, hovering over him, actively getting into his personal space.

Figure 14. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

The shift is so immediate it borders on jarring—though considering what Herbert proposes to Dan here, it is arguably fitting.

After explaining what he's done, Herbert asks that Dan formally, officially, become his assistant. While Dan initially balks at the suggestion, Herbert's rationale is fairly sound—not only is Dan knowledgeable and competent in a relevant field, he's more socially well-connect than Herbert.

WEST
Which is why I need you to help me.

DAN is stunned for a moment.

DAN
Help you?

WEST
You're the perfect person to assist me - hard woking, bright, respected by everyone, with access to certain authorities.

Figure 15. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

What Herbert lacks, Dan possesses. Where Herbert is more of a scientist, Dan is, to his core, a doctor. Even so, the intensity with which Herbert approaches this prospect is almost frightening. It is clear that on some level, the appeal of a partnership herein is not just pragmatic, it's emotional. It is unknown if Herbert, prior to now, has ever had anyone to share this secret, private passion with. We see him open up to Dan in this moment in a way he has never opened up to another character.

When Dan demands Herbert prove his claims, Herbert brings the cat back to life a third time, its body now broken and managed. As Rufus twitches grotesquely, mewling in pain upon being revived again, Dan asks, "God, why does it make that noise?" To which Herbert responds, with a small smile, "Birth is always painful," (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985).

This invoking of parental imagery, childbirth imagery, is not new for science fiction. It dates back to the original science fiction novel, *Frankenstein, A Modern Prometheus*. In many ways, Herbert West and Dan Cain, curled up side by side in their dingy rented basement, talking about birth over the convulsing not-corpse of a recently deceased animal, situates them squarely within a long-held historical context. It evokes the master-servant dynamic of seen in *Frankenstein*

(1931) with Clive's Frankenstein and Fry's Fritz, the scientist entrusting secret knowledges to his assistant whilst hiding away from his beautiful, blonde fiancé. It evokes the two doctors, equal as colleagues but emotionally highly unbalanced, coming together to create new life in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

Furthermore, this relationship would go on to influence later, sexually charged depictions of mad doctors and their assistants, like those seen in *Victor Frankenstein* (2015) and *Lisa Frankenstein* (2023). Of note is the fact that in *Lisa Frankenstein*, where the "doctor" character is a teenage girl, her assistant (and love interest) is also her creation. While theirs is a heterosexual relationship, it is similarly veiled in secrecy and illicitness; and both take pride in the creation and refinement of his body.

In *Monsters in the Closet*, Benshoff writes "Together the mad scientist and his sidekick become a major generic convention that is easily read as queer: the secret experiments they conduct together are chronicled in private diaries and kept locked away in closed cupboards and closets." (1997, 48).

Sitting almost in each other laps with only the light of a single, bare lightbulb and the sickly green glow of reagent, Dan Cain and Herbert West exemplify Benshoff's queer convention almost to a tee. To put it slightly more on the nose, as Meg descends the basement stairs and, seeing Rufus, screams in terror and agony, the actors present on the film's commentary track begin to laugh in exasperation, and Jeffrey Combs shouts, "Get her outta there! Just when I had him!" (Combs, Abbott and Crampton, et al. [1995]).

Dan, now fully convinced of the reagent's properties, attempts to plead Herbert's case to Dean Halsey. The discussion does not go over well—Dean Halsey, who it's revealed is fully aware of

why Herbert West was kicked out of school in Switzerland, reacts poorly to the realization that he's continuing his studies into the reanimation of dead tissue. The dean threatens to expel West, as well as rescind grant money owed to Dan. The move is transparently petty and unfair, particularly to Dan, whose financial situation, while never laid out in explicit detail, certainly seems to be some degree of precarious. And while Halsey's rationale is overtly about protecting the school's reputation, there's a strong insinuation that he is far more concerned about protecting the reputation of his daughter.

However, that over-protection only serves to drive a beleaguered and confused Dan Cain further into Herbert West's orbit. While not explicitly a romantic dynamic, Dan increasingly finds himself in situations where he feels the need to defend Herbert from others. This plays into an aspect of Dan's personality (explored more in-depth in the film's sequel): his need to save someone. This puts Herbert in the role of damsel in distress, further highlighting the complementary aspects of their personalities.

In a deleted scene set directly after this, Dan goes to rage about the unfairness of the situation to Meg. She, caught between the various tides of her father's disapproval, Dan's anger, and Herbert West's malevolent influence, proposes a solution—she brings up Dan's proposal of marriage, which she had previously rejected.

MEG
I love you.

He embraces her, but he gazes down the hall. She leans back and looks him in the face. She is smiling.

MEG
Then I accept.

DAN
What?

MEG
I accept proposal. Let's get married.

DAN
Your father -

MEG
It's perfect. Don't you see? Daddy will have to come around envetually, and West won't have anything to hold over us. And we'll be together.

Figure 16. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

To Meg, the choice to say yes now is obvious. Tying herself to Dan legally allows her to both shield him and be shielded by him from negative outside influences. It also gives their relationship a stronger sense of legitimacy, she hopes, in the eyes of her father. However, the timing of this decision is highly interesting.

Megan is openly, textually, threatened by Herbert West. She is afraid of how strongly Dan feels about Herbert, how willing he is to side with the man, despite a legitimate threat to his own academic credibility and financial stability. When Herbert shows up to intrude on their conversation, he is again framed as a wall between Meg and Dan—though Gordon takes it a step further here, with Herbert West literally moving Meg out of the way to put himself in between the two.

Figure 17. (Gordon, Re-Animator Deleted Scenes 1985)

Though he's not the only one blocking Meg from the conversation—as soon as Herbert arrives, Dan pivots from talking with Meg to talking past her. The two men discuss the logistics of what they'd need to do to prove Herbert's reagent works, all as Meg stands off to the side begging the man who just agreed to marry her to look at or speak to her. And while Herbert takes the discussion of his work highly seriously, he mocks Meg's attempts to connect with her partner.

MEG
Danny! Listen to me!

WEST
It's the only way - Danny.
(This last he says with
mocking sarcasm).

Figure 18. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

On the surface, Herbert's invoking of Megan's nickname for Dan feels like a continuation of what we saw earlier—his general smugness directed at Meg. But this choice to refer to Dan as

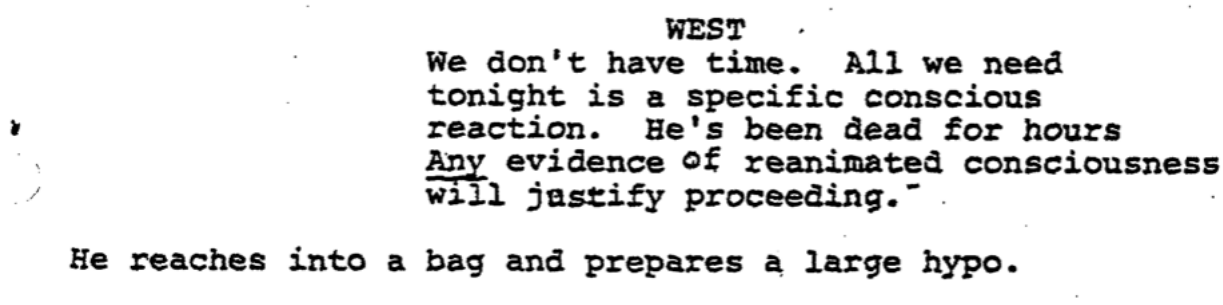
“Danny,” something we’ve only seen Meg call him, and which Herbert will never use for him in any other context, feels deeply loaded.

Ironically, the exchange is highly akin to something depicted in the 2020 miniseries *Dracula*, created by Steven Moffett and Mark Gattis. In episode one, Dracula historian and openly gay man Mark Gattis chooses to have Dracula refer to Jonathan Harker as “Johnny,” a nickname only his fiancée, Mina, uses for him. Dracula begins referring to the man as “his bride.” It is, on Gattis’s part, a purposeful heightening of the original novel’s queer subtext, to such an extent that it becomes at times almost comical. Therein, Dracula’s choice to refer to Jonathan as “Johnny” is his attempt to jump ahead in the queue of emotional development and establish a connection without having to put in the work.

Similarly, Herbert West attempts to fast-track his connection with Dan by invoking the nickname used by Meg, who has already put in the work. Notably, while *Re-Animator*'s script directions specify that Herbert uses the nickname with a sense of “mocking sarcasm,” Jeffrey Combs’s delivery of the line instead reads almost painfully sincere. While it is clearly intended to undermine Meg’s emotional history with Dan, to paint her familiarity with her partner as saccharin and silly, it’s also a form of claiming on Herbert’s part—marking his territory, if you will. Dan is no longer simply Meg’s, he is now Herberts’ as well.

Trials By Fire

Later that night, the two men break into the Miskatonic Hospital morgue, searching for a body to reanimate.



WEST
We don't have time. All we need tonight is a specific conscious reaction. He's been dead for hours Any evidence of reanimated consciousness will justify proceeding.

He reaches into a bag and prepares a large hypo.

Figure 19. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

If the scene where Dan and Herbert fought a reanimated Rufus showcased our first major turning point in their relationship, then this sequence showcases our second. Up until this point in the film, while we've certainly seen Herbert West framed as an authority figure who's deeply knowledgeable and in control, it's hard to ignore how he compares to those around him. While Herbert can certainly be menacing, actor Jeffrey Combs's short stature and overly formal air don't read particularly intimidating. And while West can certainly command a situation, it's typically in a subtle, almost Machiavellian way.

On the flip side, we have Dan Cain, our hunky, masculine protagonist. While the audience has seen Dan shaken and unsure before now, he's still always felt in-control. But here, as the two men go from body to body, Herbert calmly and self-assuredly deciding which would make the best candidate for reanimation, we see for the first time a decidedly anxious and submissive Dan. The very real threat of expulsion seems to have broken, or at least bent, something in Dan. He nervously cowers behind Herbert, his hand holding their flashlight shaking. Eventually, Herbert finds a suitable specimen: a John Doe who dropped dead from heart failure a few hours prior. Dan tries to object, but Herbert cuts him off. He shoves a recorder in Dan's hands and has him narrate Herbert's actions for posterity.

During an earlier scene with Meg and Dan, the actors on the film's commentary track joke about Meg being a "pushy girlfriend." As Herbert forcefully hands the recorder to Dan, Robert Sampson (Dean Halsey) jokes that Dan seems drawn to domineering people: "Pushy girlfriend, pushy partner..." (Combs, Abbott and Crampton, et al. [1995]).

By this point, Dan has gone from the confident, charismatic, all-American boy to looking as though he's a few moments from vomiting and blacking out. He stammers into the recorder, and at one point trails off, before blinking hard and turning to Herbert, who peevishly snaps him back to the task at hand. The tense exchange is intercut with Megan and Dean Halsey arguing about Dan. As both scenes climb towards a climax, Dan and Herbert proceed to inject their John Doe with reagent. While Dean Halsey prepares to confront them, Dan and Herbert wait with bated breath for their corpse to come alive. Somewhat predictably, it all goes off terribly.

The John Doe (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger stunt double, Peter Kent) rises from the table, mouth dripping with gore. Herbert is initially excited by the reanimated man's ability to move and respond to sounds, but the enthusiasm is short-lived as he begins to trash the morgue, throwing bodies around the room in a blind, violent rage.

Predictably, the scene is interrupted by Dean Halsey, come to investigate. He is almost immediately savaged by the reanimated man—who bites off several of his fingers and throws him hard against a wall. Dan repeatedly attempts to save his girlfriend's father, but any sense of machismo or heroism, or even the standard plot armor[2] typically afforded to a protagonist, has since abandoned him. He is left impotent, un-heroic, almost pathetic. As he screams for the reanimated man to stop, West appears suddenly behind him holding a bone saw, and

[2] A term originating from unknown users on the early internet, referring to when protagonists are spared from harm or see events bend in their favor so as for the plot to progress.

nonchalantly calls, “Dan? Look out.” (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985). He proceeds to force the saw through the John Doe’s torso, quickly but gorily killing it. Dan, rendered completely emotionally undone, collapses against one of the examination tables.

In Veronica Hollinger's “(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender,” the author posits that:

> All too often, heteronormativity is embedded in both theory and fiction as “natural” and “universal”, a kind of barley glimpsed default gender setting which remains unquestioned and unauthorized. Science fiction would seem to be ideally suited, as a narrative mode, to the smoothly oiled technologies of heteronormativity, especially when/as these invisible technologies are pressed into the service of a coercive regime of compulsory heterosexuality. (1999, 2)

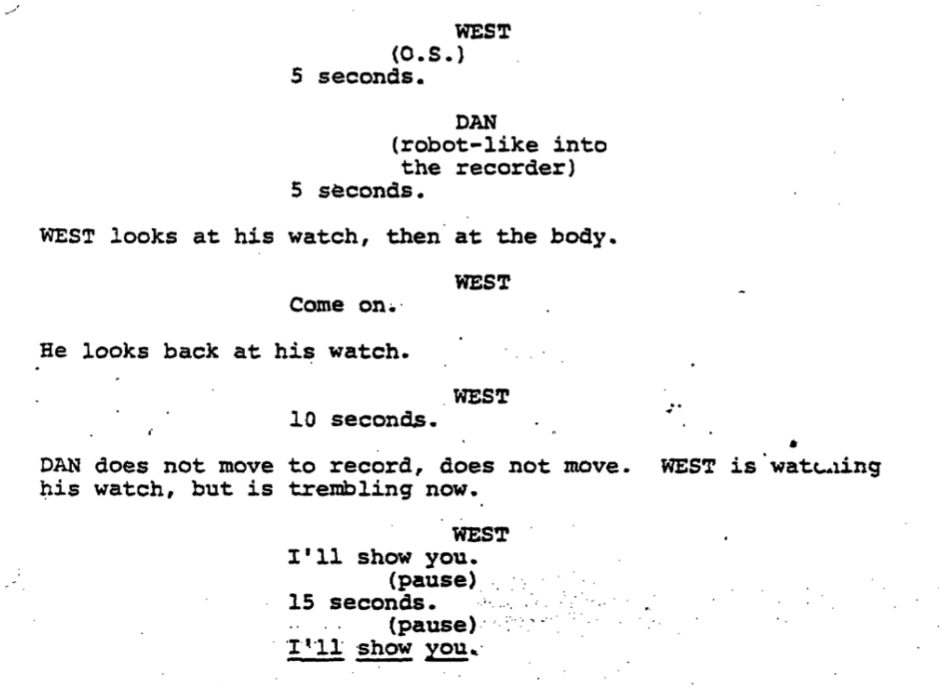
In *Re-Animator*, the genre conventions of both horror and science fiction are specifically what flip Dan and Herbert's social dynamic on its head—where every other actor is giving a performance befitting of a horror movie, Bruce Abbott plays Dan as visibly out of his depth, a character far better suited for a medical drama. While Dan’s need to be pushed and prodded around can certainly be read as something endemic to him as a character, (manifestations of a subconscious submissive desire), it's also endemic to how ill-fit he is for the genre of movie he exists in. Thus, the homoerotic nature of the film and its conventions, its literal scènes à faire, are thoroughly entwined.

Herbert is able to convince an emotionally vacant Dan that this entire situation can be undone, if they simply reanimate Dean Halsey. He hypothesizes that the John Doe's rage and confusion were ultimately the product of his having already been dead for several hours. Dan’s mind is seemingly unpenetrated by these points, as he stares almost through Dean Halsey’s body. Herbert pauses, then moves directly into Dan’s field of vision, leaning in close and staring at him

intensely. “Dan,” he almost whines, “we can bring him back to life!” (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985).

Figure 20. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

This plea, at the very least, manages to get through. Dan helps Herbert place Dean Halsey's body on an examination table and the two men prepare to revive him, not knowing that Megan is heading downstairs. Dan collapses back to the floor but is at least present enough to hold the recorder up for Herbert. The soundtrack drops out as the tension builds, and we, the audience, are left entirely with Herbert in this moment.



WEST
(O.S.)
5 seconds.

DAN
(robot-like into
the recorder)
5 seconds.

WEST looks at his watch, then at the body.

WEST
Come on.

He looks back at his watch.

WEST
10 seconds.

DAN does not move to record, does not move. WEST is watching his watch, but is trembling now.

WEST
I'll show you.
(pause)
15 seconds.
(pause)
I'll show you.

Figure 21. (Gordon, Paoli and Norris 1984)

Just as it looks like the reanimation is a failure, Herbert banging his fist on the table, Dean Halsey's eyes fly open—the soundtrack, in turn, blares back to life. The tension and excitement of the moment is undercut by the arrival of Meg, who calls to her father from the hallway outside. Upon hearing her, Herbert looks visibly annoyed, and whispers under his breath, "Damn that bitch!" (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985).

Meg's presence shatters the atmosphere Herbert had created; an atmosphere in which Dan looked to Herbert not only as an authority, but for reassurance. Meg and the security guard arrive and are horrified by the scene inside the morgue. Herbert is able to quickly spin the situation, claiming that he was simply there to see Dan when the famously overprotective Dean showed up and went crazy, throwing bodies and equipment around. Meg is besides herself, and while Dan makes some token, aborted moves to comfort her, he seems still to be in an almost fugue state, allowing himself to be pushed and pulled by Herbert West.

As the security guard rushes to call the police and Meg rushes to comfort her incoherent, strangely behaving father, Dan once again collapses, slowly curling in on himself. Distantly, we can hear Meg sobbing, but he makes no attempt to check on her—completely mentally absent from the scene. Suddenly, Herbert appears from the top-right corner of the frame, holding a security blanket. He leans down, wrapping the blanket around Dan's shoulders, and settles down behind him in an almost spooning position. Dan looks up blankly at Herbert, who simply whispers "It's just shock. Don't worry," (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985). Before slyly holding up the recorder and covering one of Dan's hands with his own.

Figure 22. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

It is prudent here, I think, to return to our previous topic of Dan and Herbert's progression of touch mirroring the progression of their relationship. Where the scene with Rufus saw a significant jump in the two men's physical closeness, here again we see their level of physical comfort progress even further. Not just in the obvious sense, like the strange, half-spooning

pictured above. If you watch the entire sequence closely, you'll notice that Dan and Herbert almost immediately go to physically comfort each other during any moment of extreme danger.

In the docuseries *Queer for Fear, The History of Queer Horror* (2022), writer/director Kimberly Ane Peirce makes the explicit connection between the high sense of tension and fear created by horror, and eroticism within the body: “The main thing about horror was... that it was exciting, to get scared, and that there was an honesty to it—because I was responding to how my body felt. So... kind of like porn,” (2022). Being constantly thrust into high-peril situations gives Herbert an opportunity to further cement Dan’s trust in him by becoming a source of comfort.

When the John Doe springs to life, both men fall back, grabbing at each other's arms. After Herbert is tossed across the room, Dan physically helps him up, allowing Herbert to put his weight on Dan's shoulder. Particularly strangely, as it's both the most innocuous and the most intimate, when the security guard Mace arrives and Herbert is forced to create a fake story on the spot, he awkwardly sidles up to Dan and says, “You see, I came down here to see... Mr. Cain...” brushing his hand against Dan’s chest (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985).

Figure 23. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

While utilizing a tense situation as a way to get two characters up close and personal with each other is certainly not endemic to horror, the often high-stakes, life-and-death nature of horror can unintentionally create a plethora of scenarios rife with subtext. Famously, films like *Saw* (2004), which were never intended to be homoerotic or intimate in any way, have taken on that characterization in the years since their release—particularly, as that film's narrative about two men chained to opposite sides of a room, who must figure out a way to both physically and emotionally come together, is rich soil for subtextual intimacy.

Figure 24. (Wan 2004)

Even the more specific choice, to have two characters defend or be protective of each other in moments of extreme horror is something that would be used for intentional homoerotic coding roughly thirty years later, with the Andy Muschietti adaptations of Stephen King's *It*. Muschietti highlights the original novel's often unintentional queer subtext by rewriting the character of Richie Tozier to be a closeted homosexual, deeply in love with his childhood best friend, Eddie Kasprak. During the first film, *It* (2017), largely set during the characters childhoods, keen eyed viewers noticed that any scene in which the group of childhood friends were being menaced, Richie would almost always run to Eddie, or put himself physically between Eddie and the source of danger.

Figure 25. Eddie and Richie, pictured left (Muschietti 2017)

This scene wasn't even originally intended to be the epitome of Dan and Herbert's physical closeness—another subplot excised from the film in its final cut involved Herbert injected himself with a diluted version of his own reagent. Its removal is understandable; the idea makes very little sense. But earlier versions of the film did include a scene where Dan helps Herbert shoot up—an almost shockingly intimate moment, even for this movie.

Herbert West as a Transgender Allegory

I have mentioned that the film presents Herbert West as a sort of outsider, both to society and to conventional masculinity. But there is evidence in the text that his unconventional approach to masculinity may go further than possible homosexuality. I would be remiss to not mention that amongst fans of the series, it is a not uncommon interpretation that Herbert West is a transgender man. There are a few reasons as to why—some certainly aesthetic in nature; Jefffrey Combs is fairly petite in frame, and as we've previously discussed, not super conventionally masculine. West dresses in an overly formal manner, one which reveals little skin. He possesses a very specific, old-fashioned name, which he insists on being called by in full. However, these traits are not, of course, intrinsically transmasculine. There isn't anything distinctly or uniquely trans

within the text. But there is certainly a strong *vibe* . What Benshoff would've referred to as "tinged with queerness," (1997).

This deleted injection scene in particular is reminiscent of a testosterone shot. While medical transition is not a requirement of gender transition, it is an integral part of many transgender people's lives. Being a doctor himself, Herbert would be privy to medical knowledge (and resources) that the average transgender person would typically struggle to get access to.

Figure 26. (Gordon, Re-Animator Deleted Scenes 1985)

Misogyny As Queercoding

The death and reanimation of her father creates a fundamental fracture in the foundation of Dan and Meg's relationship. Up to this point, we have been given very little to no information about Megan Halsey's personal life—what she studies, who her friends are, if she has any support networks outside of Dan and her father. Much of the character's sense of personality and interiority comes from the incredibly strong performance of actress Barbara Crampton. For a moment, we are allowed a brief glimpse at Meg's reality. We see how Doctor Hill almost

immediately take the opportunity to prey upon Meg in her vulnerable state, attempting to cajole Meg into giving him medical power of attorney over her father. He tells her that it'll simply make the examination process easier, when in reality he plans to lobotomize his former friend.

It is somewhat difficult to ignore the ugly subtext of Meg as a character—the structural purpose she serves the narrative herein. As I've stated previously, Lovecraft's unnamed Assistant protagonist had no girlfriend or wife or lover. The inclusion of the central female character was likely done both as an unthinking extension of bias--Dan is conventionally masculine, handsome, why wouldn't he have a girlfriend?--and as a way to include nudity in the film. Many low-budget films, particularly horror and thriller films from this time, were marketed in part on how much sex and violence they contained. This could be seen as a direct source of blame for why so many movies of this era and type contain scenes of specifically sexual violence—it is, in a highly cynical way, good economy of screentime. However, in the same way that viewing Dan Cain as simply a Heterosexual Protagonist undercuts much of his agency in the narrative, viewing Meg Halsey as a walking, often screaming, pair of breasts undercuts the deep emotionality and interiority Crampton imbues the character with.

I have admittedly struggled at points writing this to not reduce Meg down to the least interesting axis of a love triangle—what Eve Sedgwick would've referred to as "a female non-object," (1986). Unfortunately, the film both textually and subtextually makes it very easy to do. Dan's repeated shirking of his duties as a partner, combined with his and West's psychosexually fascinating dynamic almost puts one in the same position as Herbert—viewing Meg as an obstacle. But her actions in this scene, her choice to firmly stand her ground and refuse to let Hill have the upper hand despite how visibly emotionally overwhelmed she is, demonstrates a tremendous sense of integrity and character. It's no wonder Stuart Gordon would rewrite the

protagonist of Lovecraft's *From Beyond* to be a woman, so Crampton could play her in his film adaptation.

As Dan goes to comfort Meg, Hill goes to confront Herbert. Hill has by this point sussed out that Dean Halsey is, or at least was, dead, and that it must be Herbert's doing. West humors him, showing Hill his research.

Hill plans to take credit for his reagent and force Herbert to pose as his assistant. While this alone would seem enough to enflame Herbert, he remains stoic. But when Hill specifically states that they'll need to find a way to get rid of Dan (supposedly to eliminate witnesses, but transparently, selfishly, to eliminate Meg's partner) something in Herbert's manner seems to change. As Hill continues to look over the work, Herbert slips away and proceeds to bash the distracted doctor over the head, before decapitating him, bitterly whispering "Plagiarist.".

Out of sheer curiosity, West decides to attempt reanimating both Hill's now-separate head and body, respectively. Unfortunately, it works, and he is promptly knocked unconscious by Hill, who absconds with all of Herbert's research, most of his reagent, and his own sentient severed head. Dan is, of course, furious to learn about this upon his return. Herbert argues that they need to start preparing for Hill's next move, and Dan deduces that he's almost certainly going to go after Meg.

This is the first time Herbert West learns about Doctor Hill's sexual obsession with Megan, and his reaction can only be described as bafflement—to Herbert, the desire for fame, money, recognition, these are all understandable. They are not necessarily what *he* desires, Herbert seems largely driven by science for science's sake. But at the very least, he is capable of wrapping his head around the idea that people like being famous and having money. However,

the desire for a *woman*—for sexual gratification from a female partner, or even sexual subjugation of a female partner, is almost entirely foreign to him. He reacts with utter confusion and disdain when Dan says he wants to warn Megan and literally laughs when Dan reveals that Hill's almost certainly planning to go after her. Herbert views the idea of attraction to women as something beneath a respectable scientist—a distraction from the ever-important and necessary work of progress. If he holds the same beliefs about attraction to men, it is never showcased or explored.

Additionally, if we read Herbert West as a transgender man, we could also here argue that his lack of interest in women is something that calls his manhood into question—if the character was raised as a girl, it's unlikely he would have been socially conditioned or expected to be interested in womanhood, and by extension women, entirely.

From this point, the film sprints towards its climax. Hill forces the reanimated, lobotomized Dean Halsey to kidnap his own daughter, who he brings to the Miskatonic morgue after hours. There, he straps her down to a table, and the sentient severed head of Doctor Hill attempts to rape her. This shocking and bizarre scene of sexual violence is, ironically, interrupted by Herbert West with the comment, "I must say, Dr. Hill, I'm very disappointed—you steal the secret of life and death, and here you are trysting with a bubble headed co-ed. You're not even a second-rate scientist" (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985). Lest we assume that Herbert's intentions are in any way noble, the language he uses makes both his misogyny and his mental correlation of science to masculinity. He reduces what is very clearly an act of rape down to "trysting," a word which implies mutual consent, and refers to Meg as a "bubble headed co-ed." And in the same breath, he makes a point of implying that Hill's very interest in a woman makes him less of a scientist, and ergo, less of a man.

Hill reveals he's reanimated all of the corpses in the Miskatonic morgue with West's pilfered reagent, and proceeds to sic them on Herbert and Dan. It is interesting to note that these reanimated corpses all appear entirely naked. The presence of specifically unsexualized, medical nudity is notable, given how frequently lower-budgeted horror films from this era will take any opportunity to present sexual nudity. This is particularly of note, given the sexual connotations of Dan and Herbert's fully-clothed confrontation with Hill. Part of how Herbert eventually defeats Doctor Hill is by overloading his body with reagent, literally causing his organs to explode out of his torso and wrap around Herbert, attempting to strangle him—Herbert is literally gagged and restrained by Hill's self-possessed lower intestine, evoking the imagery often found in works of bondage or tentacle porn.

Figure 27. Production still from the set of Re-Animator (Empire Pictures n.d.)

Ironically, the presence of naked bodies is arguably the least sexual component of the scene. Nudity is intrinsically natural—whatever is happening between Dan, Herbert, and this possessed lower intestine is clearly not.

Speaking of Dan and Herbert—to bring their progression of touch full circle, we see Herbert, restrained by Hill's organs, throw the medical bag containing his notes and reagent to Dan. Dan catches it, before reaching out to grab at Herbert. As Meg attempts to pull Dan out of the morgue, the two men's fingers brush against each other, almost but not quite grasping, in the exact same room where Herbert first refused to shake Dan's hand.

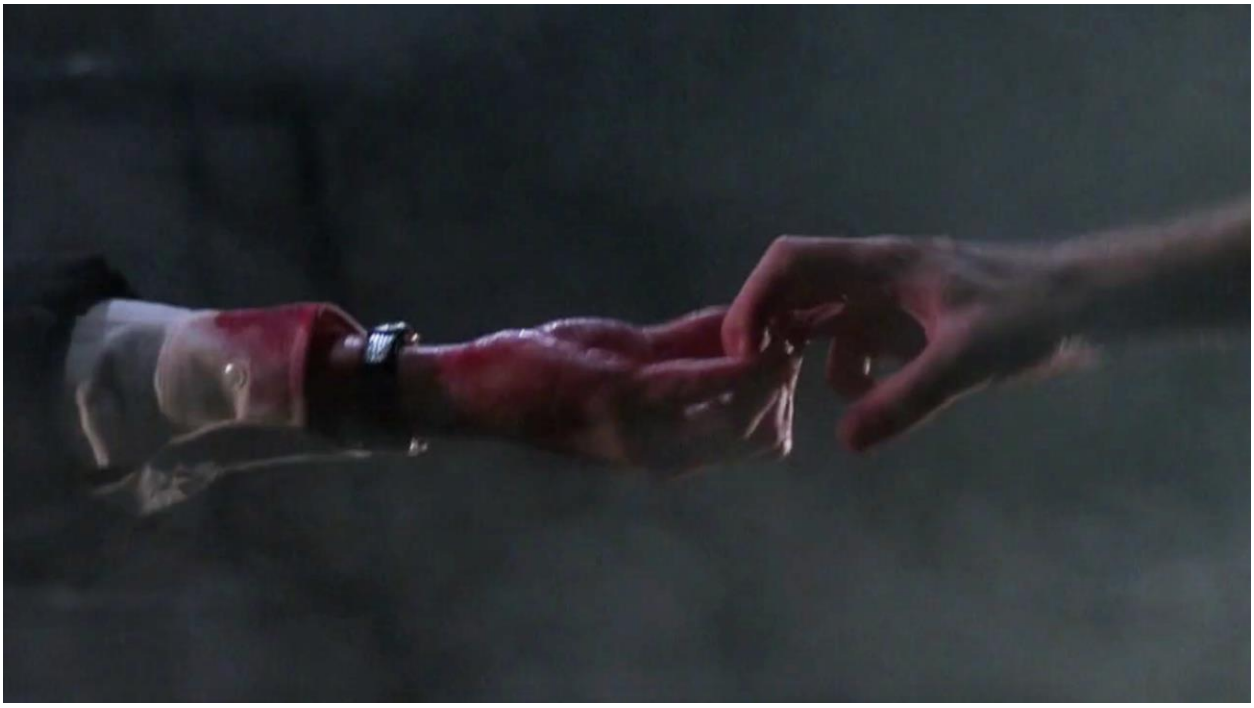


Figure 28. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

In this moment, Dan is forced to make a choice—hand Meg can make it to safety, all he has to do is abandon Herbert to his likely death. In the end, Dan chooses Meg and it seems their survival is assured. However, as the two rush for the elevator, they are accosted by one final reanimated person. The living corpse starts brutally choking Meg, and Dan has to grab a fire axe

and sever its arm. By the time he does, however, it's too late. Dan brings Meg into an empty hospital room and attempts to revive her, but she's already dead. Again, Doctor Herod has to tell Dan that he needs to give up. The narrative, it seems, has decided Dan has made the wrong choice, and has set out to punish him for it.

He's given a moment alone with Meg, as the attending hospital staff leave to see about the commotion. Dan looks down at Meg, tears in his eyes, and we see a subtle shift in his gaze. He opens Herbert's medical bag and retrieves a vial of reagent, filling a syringe with it. As he leans back over Meg, he whispers, "I love you," before injecting the neon green liquid into her neck—one final signifier of how Herbert West has fundamentally changed him (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985). The screen goes black, and we hear a horrible, piercing scream from Barbara Crampton, as the film's theme begins to play, and the end credits start to roll.

A Queer Legacy

In the years following its release, the film would garner a cult status—becoming a stable at Blockbusters and VHS rental stores' horror sections. While it's difficult to find concrete metrics for cult classic movies, we can see consistent references to the film in various horror-centric publications and other horror films, as well as occasional mainstream shoutouts—most notably, the discussion of its infamous rape scene in Oscar winning film *American Beauty* (1999). Of course, few, if any, of these pertained to the film's subtext, or its relationship to gender.

While *Re-Animator* would never completely leave the public conscious, the landscape of horror would change very rapidly in the wake of its sequel, *Bride of Reanimator*'s, release. While its practical gore effects remain impressive, the cherry-red Kensington Gore blood and guts, with their vaguely campy quality, would fall out of fashion as more realistic violence in horror in

franchises like *Saw* and *Hostile* became the mainstream pop culture de jour. Over time, the film would largely be boiled down in collective memory to its most infamous scenes, and its iconic horror poster. If there was a fandom keen to discuss the film's subtext around this time, it was likely an informal one whose footprint has gone largely unrecorded.

Our earliest references to *Re-Animator*'s homoerotic nature come from the cast and crew themselves. However, one could argue that these opinions were born out of a highly specific environment—Combs, Abbott, and Crampton were all very early-on in their careers at the time of making the film. By all accounts, the atmosphere on set was both highly charged and highly jocular, something you can see reflected in the commentary track—which I would personally describe as *delightfully rowdy*. The actors' chemistry and friendship may well have colored the perception of the characters for those in the production, particularly given that Combs and Abbott would frequently do things like mime preforming sex acts on each other as an on-set joke.

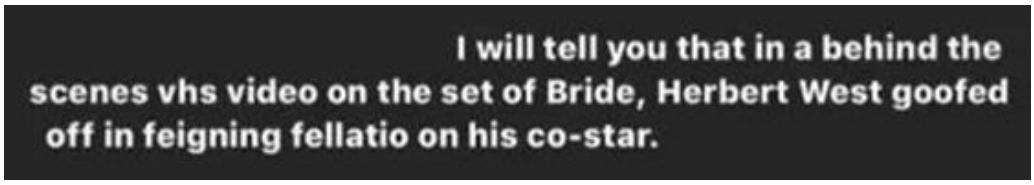

I will tell you that in a behind the scenes vhs video on the set of Bride, Herbert West goofed off in feigning fellatio on his co-star.

Figure 29. Excerpt from Q&A with Brian Yuzna (2021)

Our earliest references outside of the actors come from the film's official novelization, written by Jeff Rovin and published in 1986. The book is fascinating for several reasons—it was written before any of the *Re-Animator* sequels, and provides new, original backstories for the characters. But what's most compelling about the book, in my opinion, is its position as a historical artifact. Rovin's novelization contains likely the earliest in-print acknowledgement of *Re-Animator*'s unintentional queer coding, as Rovin seems very convinced that Herbert West is a homosexual

man. He tweaks and rewrites certain scenes to indicate such, both in subtle, subtextual ways, and in some fairly loud, overt ways. While certainly not progressive by any stretch of the imagination, the sheer existence of the text does provide us with important historical context on this matter—it shows that even as early as one year after the film's release, there was discussion and awareness of how Herbert West, as a character, read sexually.

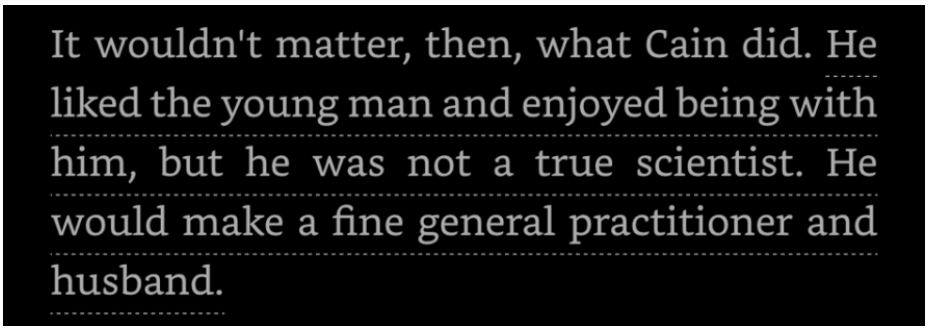

It wouldn't matter, then, what Cain did. He liked the young man and enjoyed being with him, but he was not a true scientist. He would make a fine general practitioner and husband.

Figure 30. (Rovin 1986)

Within the novelization, Herbert West's backstory involves his parents dying in a house fire while he's quite young, resulting in much of his adolescence spent jumping from group home to group home—a largely homosocial upbringing. Rovin leans heavily on the characterization of West as an intruder upon Dan and Meg's perfect heterosexual union. Most pointedly, we can see through multiple characters internal monologues various open speculations at the nature of Dan and Herbert's relationship.

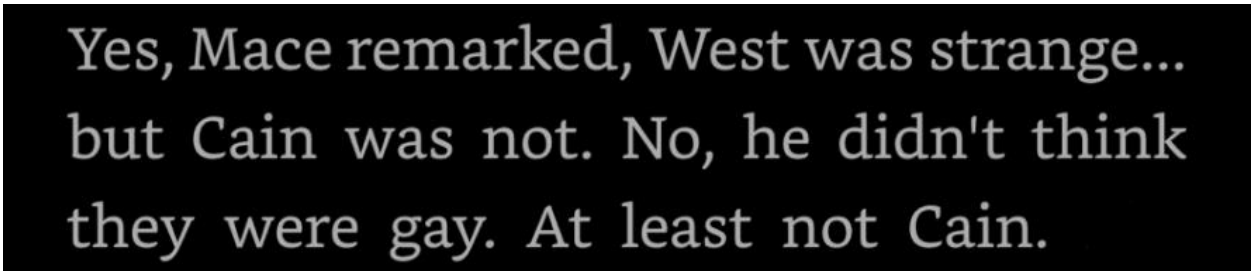


Figure 31. (Rovin 1986)

The above sentiment is repeated several times—while Herbert is roundly perceived as gay, Dan is presumed straight by dint of his masculinity and girlfriend. One of the notable indications of this comes in the form of a wholly original scene—after the failed reanimation of Dean Halsey, Dan and Herbert are questioned by the police. Herbert takes the lead on questioning as Dan is clearly still in a state of shock.

> [The officer] turned. “You two live together, right?” Cain nodded. “Anything fishy going on?”
> “Fishy?” Cain asked.
> “Sexual. You guys lovers?” Cain snickered, and West's eyes fell to the floor.
> “No,” Cain replied, “we're not lovers. I'm engaged to be married, for Christ's sake.”
> “So are half the guys who give Tootsie Pops to little boys in school-yards.” (Rovin 1986, 112)

Notably, while Dan jumps to the defense of his own heterosexuality, Herbert pointedly refuses to answer. He spends the rest of the interrogation giving short, simple answers and refusing to engage. Ironically, this exchange is highly akin to one cited within *Monsters in the Closet*, from the film *How to Make a Monster* (1958):

> PETE : He told you he was only my assistant.
> COP: You shut up and let him talk for himself, [lewdly] Sure he's your assistant—we know that—how far does his assistance go? [to Rivero] Who do you live with?
> RIVERO: I live alone ...
> COP: Ever been married?
> RIVERO: No. (Benshoff 1997)

This exchange ends up coming full circle in another wholly invented scene, when Dan and Herbert race to rescue Megan from Dr. Hill.

> Cain took a deep breath and said quietly, “The truth is, sir, I may have AIDS. That's what we're going to the hospital to find out.” He looked down at his feet. “And if you must know, that's why Dean Halsey was so upset.” Papa took a step back. At that moment, West saw in his face everything he hated about the human race: fear, prejudice, self-absorption, and ignorance. He could see that, unlike most doctors, he would have to administer his serum very selectively. Certain people just didn't deserve immortality.

> The detective's mouth curled wryly. “So I was right about you, huh?” Cain said nothing. His voice tinged with superiority, he said, “You're queer, and you bullshitted me.” (Rovin 1986, 148)

Rovin’s novelization, while certainly imperfect and actively homophobic at times, stands as an important milestone in the historical discussion of *Re-Animator*’s subtext. And, well, we’ve discussed where it goes from there—the film is now regarded as a queer cult classic by fans.

The Bride of Re-Animator (1990)

Blasphemy? Before what God?!

An Unexpected Re-turn

No one expected *Re-Animator* to be a success on the level that it was.

Certainly, the cast and crew were aware, even on set, that what they were making was a genuinely great film. But if that quality could translate into measurable success, particularly for a low-budget, cheesy horror flick, was another question entirely. Anyone familiar with the trajectory of popular cult-classic horror films can likely predict what happened—while *Re-Animator* was only a moderate success at the box office, it exploded in popularity following its release to home video.

As early as 1986, Gordon was bandying about the idea of a sequel—in an interview with John Andrew Gallager for *Film Directors on Directing*, he even specifically mentions that if he were to write and direct a follow up to *Re-Animator*, it'd likely be titled *The Bride of Re-Animator* (Gordon 1989).

Information about why Gordon chose both not to return as director, or to contribute to the film's script, is murky at best. The most commonly agreed upon explanation is that Gordon had simply wanted to return to his roots, as a Chicago native and theatre director. By the time *Bride of Re-Animator* began pre-production in 1989, Gordon and Yuzna had collaborated on a small handful of films together, including *From Beyond* and *Dolls*. It seems as though Gordon, increasingly finding himself not cut out for film direction, trusted Yuzna enough to helm the sequel. Yuzna would take over directing duties and brought on script writers Woody Keith and Rick Fry to help

pen *Bride*'s script—the two having worked with him previously on arguably his most notable solo film, *Society*.

Bride of Re-Animator has had a complicated, if you'll pardon the pun, afterlife. The film was not highly received upon release—*Re-Animator*, even just a few years after its initial theatrical run, was already viewed as a classic horror film. Even Roger Ebert, a critic infamous for what many have argued was an overly-critical, almost moralistic hatred of horror, gave *Re-Animator* four out of five stars, stating "I walked out somewhat surprised and reinvigorated (if not re-animated) by a movie that had the audience emitting taxi whistles and wild goat cries. [...] I was reminded of Pauline Kael's sane observation: *The movies are so rarely great art, that if we can't appreciate great trash, there is little reason for us to go*." (Ebert 1985)

But if *Re-Animator* was seen as "great trash", then *Bride* was regarded by many as simply "trash". However, I would argue that in some ways, the film being notably rougher around the edges has made it **easier** for some fans to love. There is a work you as an audience member have to put into caring for the film, to justify your love of its strangeness, its incongruities. *Re-Animator* is a straightforwardly great movie—*Bride of Re-Animator* is a psychosexual diamond-in-the-rough. You can actually see this reflected in the differences between the actor's commentary tracks for the first and second film. Where *Re-Animator*'s is rowdy and joking—with the actors literally shouting over each other in places, trading jokes and barbs, narrating parts of the film, *Bride*'s is a lot more subdued. It only features Jeffrey Combs and Bruce Abbott, and you can hear in places an audible displeasure with some of how the film turned out. At the same time, it contains some of the most interesting and detailed dissections of their characters dynamic one can find.

In Close Quarters

The film opens not long after where *Re-Animated* ended—a title card informs us:

> EIGHT MONTHS LATER AND TEN THOUSAND MILES AWAY FROM THE MASSACRE AT MISKATONIC MEDICAL SCHOOL, DOCTORS HERBERT WEST AND DAN CAIN FINISH THEIR TOURS AS VOLUNTEER MEDICS IN A BLOODY CIVIL WAR, WHERE THEY HAVE FOUND A KEY ELEMENT IN THEIR EXPERIMENTS INTO THE NATURE OF LIFE... AND DEATH. (Yuzna 1990).

In short, following the first film's climax, Dan and Herbert have fled the United States to work with the Red Cross in Peru.

In the way *Re-Animator*'s opening scene served as a highly succinct tone setter, *Bride*'s does an impressive job of showcasing how Dan and Herbert's dynamic has evolved in the time between films one and two. In contrast to the previous movie where their relationship was in a constant state of flux vis-a-ví social dominance, here we see a more egalitarian version of their dynamic, albeit a more emotionally fraught one. The two men argue passionately over the open, hemorrhaging chest of a wounded soldier.

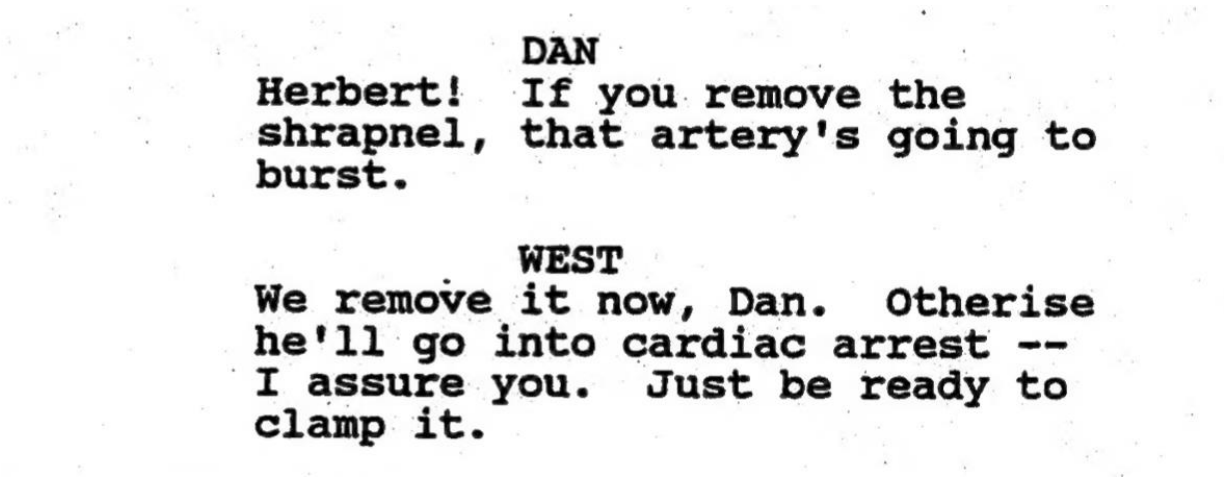

DAN
Herbert! If you remove the shrapnel, that artery's going to burst.
WEST
We remove it now, Dan. Otherise he'll go into cardiac arrest -- I assure you. Just be ready to clamp it.

Figure 32. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

The two now operate like a well-oiled machine—their time in Peru having calcified their dynamic. This can further be seen in the progression of touch discussed in our previous chapter; whereas in the first movie it took a considerable amount of time for Dan and Herbert to become physically comfortable with each other, here the two grab at, push, guide, and touch with a level of comfort and impunity not seen in the first film.

As the two men attempt to extract a large piece of shrapnel from a wounded solder's chest…

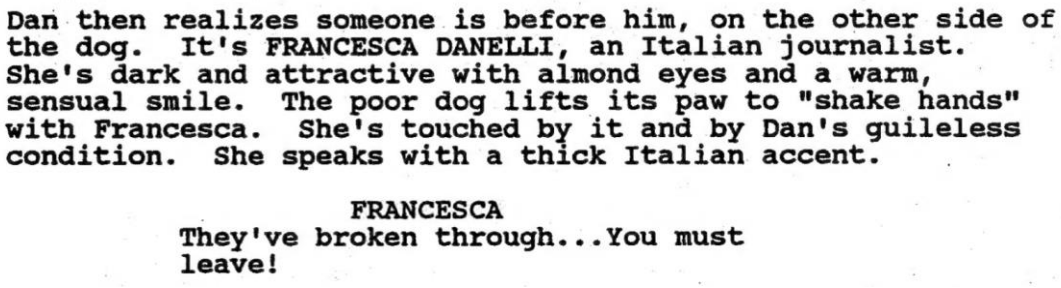
> CAMERA SLOWLY MOVES DOWNWARD, from West and Dan, down past the boy, to BELOW the OPERATING TABLE. A TRICKLE OF BLOOD catches up with the downward CAMERA MOVEMENT. Then suddenly BLOOD floods over the table. A red veil of plasma. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

This is how the script puts it, but in the film's final cut, the blood instead spurts upward, hitting Dan square in the face. Dan will spend much of the film being splattered with blood—usually while performing surgery with Herbert, in a way that often feels quasi-erotic. Articles about this film love to cite quotes regarding blood as the proverbial "money shot" of horror—director Roberta Findlay stating, "You know the money shots in porn films? Well, this was just a different substance: it was red," (2003); or film academic Walter Evans writing: "In the

unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen," (1973) for his essay *Monster Movies: A Sexual Theory.* It's certainly a striking comparison, if a little obvious. Certainly, it is aesthetically in line with Brian Yuzna's other work: *Society*, a film which ends in a mass, incestuous group orgy where characters melt together into a Hieronimus Bosch-style amalgam of flesh, *Silent Night Deadly Night 4*, where a lesbian-coded cult of witches cause a woman to undergo sexually charged, bug-based body horror.

Yuzna has always been one for the marriage of grotesque and erotic imagery. Importantly though, he's also historically been drawn to mentally or emotionally unstable characters. The protagonists of both films mentioned above are superficially successful, but emotionally broken individuals. So, it's no surprise that the film sees a continuation of Dan's emotional and psychological downward spiral. We'll learn in exposition peppered throughout the film that the reanimation of Meg Halsey, implied by the ending of *Re-Animator*, was unsuccessful, leaving Dan on unstable mental ground.

Dan walks away from the young soldier's body, covered in blood, with a far off, glassy look in his eye. The periodic bouts of shock we see in the first film herein have calcified to extensive dissociative episodes. It's here we're introduced to Dan's love interest for the film—Italian journalist Francesca Danelli, a woman who steps into their tent and out of the fires of war, in a moment described almost angelically within the film's script, an adorable dog in tow. Beautiful and perfect, particularly for Dan, to such an extent that it circles back to vaguely comical.



Dan then realizes someone is before him, on the other side of the dog. It's FRANCESCA DANELLI, an Italian journalist. She's dark and attractive with almond eyes and a warm, sensual smile. The poor dog lifts its paw to "shake hands" with Francesca. She's touched by it and by Dan's guileless condition. She speaks with a thick Italian accent.

FRANCESCA
They've broken through...You must leave!

Figure 33. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

While Megan Halsey certainly wasn't the most fleshed-out character, she was at the very least imbued with a lot of life and personality by Barbara Crampton. And even though she mostly served to bolster Dan's image as a heterosexual everyman, it is clear from the outset that she and Dan had an extensive personal history. Unfortunately, while Francesca has a far more developed backstory and ostensibly more interesting traits than Meg, their purposes in the narratives are fundamentally the same—to provide a sense of plausible deniability to Dan's sexuality.

The film's script sees a traumatized Dan, kneeling on the dirt floor of a Red Cross medical tent covered in suggestive gore merely ten feet away from his partner, as he and Francesca share something approximating a meet-cute; bonding over her dog. This, too, seems reminiscent of Yuzna's œuvre, particularly a similar scene in *Society* where protagonist Bill Whitby gets squirted in the face with sunblock by his love interest, just a few feet away from the girlfriend he will soon leave.

Figure 34. Bill Whitby in Society (Yuzna 1989)

Certainly illustrative of a pattern.

In the final film, however, this meet-cute is cut for time. Instead, Francesca simply walks in on Herbert having recently reanimated and re-killed the young soldier. Upon noticing her presence, he threatens her with a loaded gun, which Dan, more exasperated than anything, simply grabs and points away. It's a subtle character moment that encapsulates two important changes within their dynamic—Herbert West has become increasingly unstable in his quest to perfect his reagent, and Dan Cain has become increasingly nonchalant about wrangling his partner's more homicidal instincts.

Dan and Francesca's extremely burgeoning romance is cut short, however, when militia members beginning attacking the tent—during which we see numerous examples of the aforementioned physical comfort; things like Herbert grabbing the front of Dan's shirt for stability, or Dan literally wrapping his arms around Herbert's waist in an attempt to drag him out of the medical tent. In the commotion of the attack, Dan takes a bayonet to the side—lying prone on the ground, surrounded by rapidly spreading fire, Herbert kneels over Dan and rips his shirt open to survey the damage.

Figure 35. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

While this isn't necessarily more graphic or suggestive than what we've seen in the previous film, it does speak to a fascinating interplay between the concepts of sex and surgery not present in *Re-Animator*. The chemical nature of West's reagent meant that neither Dan nor Herbert were ever pictured performing any type of extensive surgical procedures. Things like lobotomies and brain surgeries are mentioned but largely practiced off screen. Herein, however, we see both men both repeatedly get up close and personal with various characters' insides.

Herbert gives Dan a once-over, presumably to ensure that nothing's been fatally damaged, before dragging him out of the burning tent. While it's never directly confirmed within the film, there's an insinuation that Herbert will be the one to stitch Dan up, oversee his recovery. If *Re-Animator*'s Herbert stakes his claim over Dan with the subtle use of pet names and almost Machiavellian moves to undermine his relationships, the Herbert West of *Bride* does so by fundamentally reshaping Dan from the inside out.

The often allegorical nature of horror means that it is not uncommon within the subgenre of medical horror for medical processes the human body is subjected to in a hospital or medicinal setting to act as a stand-in for conventional sexual contact with the body. We see this in the films like *May* (2002), wherein the title character creates her own sort of Frankenstein's monster out of the disparate body parts of people she is attracted to but cannot connect with. We see it in *A Cure for Wellness* (2016), where our unsuspecting protagonist is strapped to a gurney by a male doctor (who we eventually learn is a sexual predator), and has tubbing forcibly and suggestively shoved down his throat. We see it in *Dead Ringers* (1988) where the twin male protagonists' obsession with their gynecological work frequently trends into the sexual. We see this probably most overtly in *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973) where Dr. Frankenstein literally has sex with a human gallbladder during surgery. As Michael J. Collins put it in his article, "The Body of the Work of the Body: Physio-Textuality in Contemporary Horror": "Medical horror functions through a natural mixture of two frightening mysteries—that of the body's capacity to destroy itself and medicine's purpose to alter the body. In the work of medical horror, we find our most squeamish fears and fantasies brought to life [...]" (1993, 33).

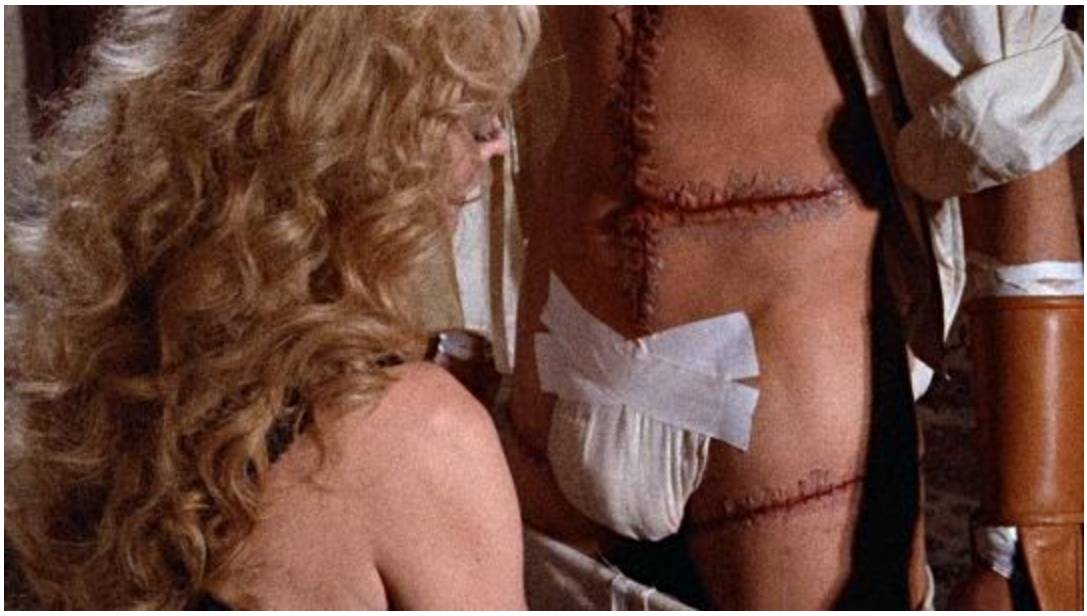


Figure 36. Flesh for Frankenstein (Morrissey 1973)

Trouble in Paradise

Following the opening sequence, we get another time skip—though it's unclear how long this one is meant to be. As the film's opening credits end, we see that our leads are back in Arkham, Massachusetts; though now working at Arkham General Hospital. At the very least, it's been several months—Dan and Herbert are fully settled into their new roles as doctors.

We're reintroduced to Dan in this particular role as he comforts a patient before surgery—a young woman named Gloria who he's developed somewhat of a fixation on. While Gloria isn't as present within the film as Francesca, her character feels far more narratively important. In some ways, she's as much a commentary on Barbara Crampton's role in the original *Re-Animator* as Crampton's own appearance in *From Beyond* was: an exploration of Meg Halsey's unfulfilled potential. In a subsequent scene, Dan will openly state that Gloria reminds him of Meg, despite the two women looking almost nothing alike, nor sharing notably similar characteristics. His fixation on Gloria feels far more like a byproduct of Dan's aforementioned subconscious savior

complex—still needing to see himself as the dashing, romantic hero, who could save someone with either his medical knowledge or sheer charisma. Whereas Herbert predominantly filled the role of damsel for Dan in *Re-Animator*, here we begin to see an inkling of a fracture in their dynamic. It seems Dan would rather play the dashing hero with Gloria, as opposed to the kept assistant of a closet mad scientist.

Dan and Gloria's interactions even mirror his and Meg's in the previous film, through their shot composition. As they converse, Herbert lurks in the background, positioned between the two. While Meg is no longer around, Herbert continues to serve as a fundamental impediment to Dan's relationships with women.

Figure 37. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

When Gloria is wheeled out of the room for surgery and Herbert tries to follow, Dan forcefully reminds him that she is a patient, not an experiment. Herbert attempts to push back against this,

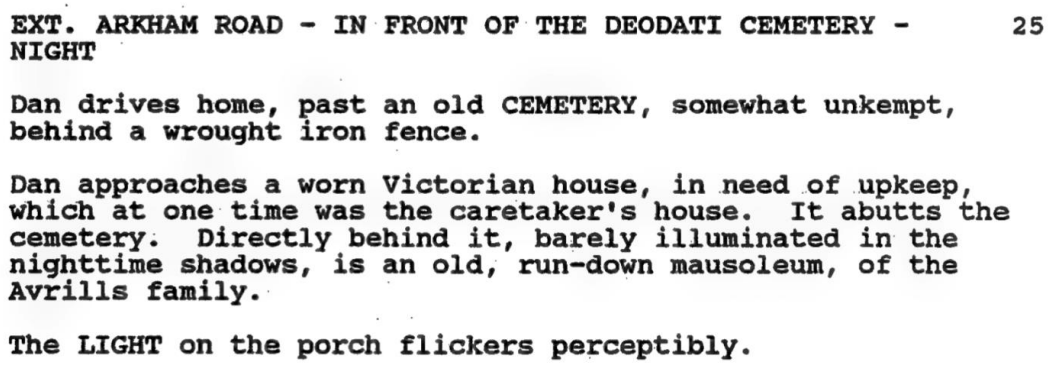
leading to a heated exchange between the two that ends with Dan storming out of the room. The commentary track sums it up nicely:

> Both: [Laughing]
> Combs: [with faux exasperation] You just don't care!
> Abbott: No, he doesn't. He wants out! Dan wants out.
> Combs: [shyly, as though channeling Herbert West]Yeah, but... I need you Dan."
> Abbott: [sighs] Yup. (Combs and Abbott [2002])

While obviously these men are not their characters, the exchange confirms that Dan and Herbert's evolving dynamic is on a notable downturn. Whereas in the first film, Dan's attachment to Herbert seems propelled in large part both by a fear of letting patients die, as well as a general affability and trust in his fellow man, here Dan seems fully disillusioned with his partner—someone he now recognizes as intrinsically manipulative, ambitious to a fault, deeply dangerous, and deeply codependent.

Home is Where the Heart Is

We eventually learn that Dan and Herbert are still, in fact, living together. Interestingly however, not in the same home that they shared in *Re-Animator*—the two seemingly having bought a house together since returning from Peru.



EXT. ARKHAM ROAD - IN FRONT OF THE DEODATI CEMETERY - NIGHT 25

Dan drives home, past an old CEMETERY, somewhat unkempt, behind a wrought iron fence.

Dan approaches a worn Victorian house, in need of upkeep, which at one time was the caretaker's house. It abutts the cemetery. Directly behind it, barely illuminated in the nighttime shadows, is an old, run-down mausoleum, of the Avrills family.

The LIGHT on the porch flickers perceptibly.

Figure 38. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

There is, of course, an obvious line of inquiry herein—as opposed to the first film, where Dan and Herbert's cohabitation could be rationalized as a financially pragmatic living situation, albeit one with a very charged energy. Here, there is no real reason for both men to still be under the same roof. The actors themselves even joke about this—as Dan enters his and Herbert's shared home for the first time Jeffrey Combs quips, "Our living room... Why are we living together?" Bruce Abbott laughs, responding, "I don't know!" (Combs and Abbott [2002]). It's a legitimate question. Dan and Herbert are now no longer medical students—they've moved from their previous home to a completely different country, and subsequently back to a different residence in the same American town. They're both employed as doctors and presumably possess the funds necessary to live independently. Seemingly, this is a matter of preference, albeit one likely skewed in Herbert's favor.

This narrative choice, to have Dan and Herbert go from a plausibly deniable roommate situation to co-homeowners, takes their relationship into a realm that feels undeniably domestic—something which even the script itself seems aware of, particularly in how Yuzna et al. characterize the two men's different relationship to their shared home and its effect on their changing dynamic.

In many ways, Dan is now defined by a desire to extricate himself both from their shared home, as well as from West. Upon returning to the house, he finds Herbert in the basement laboratory, working on his newest obsession—creating strange, undead amalgams out of disparate body parts. This prompts an ugly fight between the two—as domestic as their relationship reads, their conflict reads similarly like a domestic dispute.

Figure 39. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

If we are to interpret Dan and Herbert's partnership as being reminiscent of a more conventional union, then it feels most akin to the heterosexual marriages seen in sitcoms and dramatic plays—constricting, oppressive, and divided along gendered (or in this case, allegorically gendered) lines. In short, an unhappy one. Arguably this can be seen most transparently in Dan, the more conventionally masculine, figurative husband, tied down by his nagging partner, shouldering the burdens of working and maintaining social relationships, as well as keeping Herbert out of trouble. Yet he reaps little to none of the benefits expected in a traditional spousal relationship.

Because if Herbert West is a housewife, he is not a very good one. As opposed to the previous film, *Bride of Re-Animator* more overtly ties Herbert West to the home—the character seems largely to view his being a doctor as means to an end of financial stability and easy access to body parts, and unlike *Re-Animator,* where the action is split evenly between Miskatonic's hospital and the two men's residence, here we only ever see Herbert reanimate in the privacy of his own basement. This single-minded devotion to his work causes him to become derelict in his "wifely" duties, something highlighted in the films script; multiple references are made to how unused and unkempt the common spaces in Dan and Herbert's shared home are, outside of the lab. Special note is made of the spaces stereotypically associated with domestic feminine work, like the kitchen: "Dan turns on the light and walks purposefully but reticently through the kitchen. The kitchen is old and in need of some repair. It's very clean, but with no food or utensils out. It hasn't been used," (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989, 27).

It's a characterization that once again, bleeds over into the jokes on the commentary track—in several scenes we see Herbert wearing a plastic medical smock (presumably to protect himself from gore, another inversion of the archetypical housewife). During one such instance, Bruce Abbott stops mid-sentence to joke "Love the apron, Betty." Combs laughs, responding, "Yeah, thank you darling!" (Combs and Abbott [2002]).

While this particular analysis does paint a somewhat grim portrait of Dan and Herbert's relationship, it should be noted that they've clearly moved beyond the solely pragmatic—regardless of if you read their dynamic as either domestic or the more conventional doctor-assistant. Before Dan informs him that he plans to move out, this scene is arguably the most joyous and relaxed we've seen Herbert in the series. He giggles, jokes, and gleefully explains his scientific process. And when Dan does indeed drop the bomb, he is legitimately taken aback.

WEST
Dr. Hill gave me the idea.

West smiles weirdly.

West takes the cloth off the tray, revealing FOUR SEVERED HUMAN FINGERS and a HUMAN EYEBALL.

Dan's enthusiasm fades, confronted with the carnal reality of their experiments. He turns to West, and finally comes out with what he's been trying to say.

DAN
I'm moving out, Herbert.

West stops momentarily. Looks over at Dan, incredulous.

DAN
I'm moving out.

Figure 40. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

It's notable that this is framed as not just a loss, but a personal loss—as far as we see, Herbert lacks any form of support network save for Dan. Like a marriage, he has crafted a life around this person, and losing them is not only a devastating emotional blow, but also a loss of stability, of home, of routine. In the nearly five years between the making of *Re-Animator* and *Bride of Re-Animator*, both principal actors went through some physical changes. Relevant here is that Jeffrey Combs goes from being extremely slight in the first film to having slightly filled out a little bit more by the time of the second—and while this isn't something directly addressed by the script, dialogue from the first movie like,

> DAN: When do you sleep?
> HERBERT: Sleep is a waste of time. (Gordon, Re-Animator 1985)

indicate a person not living an especially healthy or balanced lifestyle. The visual storytelling herein implies that Dan provides Herbert with a sense of structure previously missing from his life—the body, what Michael Collins refers to as "the most canonized of texts, becom[ing] itself

both the agent and vehicle of horror" (1993, 30), changed not only through said acts of horror, but through acts of love, support, companionship.

Allegorical Parenthood

As the realization that Dan intends to actually leave sinks in, Herbert becomes visibly panicked. During an earlier sequence in the film, we see Herbert enter a medical evidence locker to retrieve some confiscated reagent lost in the climax of the previous movie. The scene primarily exists to establish the return of Doctor Hill's severed, sentient head, but we also see Herbert clearly recognize and pocket an organ stored therein. With Dan turning to storm out of the basement, Herbert pulls out the preverbal big guns.

WEST
I didn't see you rejecting my work when Meg was lying dead! Where were your great ideals then?

The mention of Meg hits home. Dan stops yelling and soberly looks at the floor.

West calms down and reasons with him.

WEST
What was it about Meg that you loved, Dan?

Dan tenses up at this subject.

Figure 41. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

Herbert produces Meg's heart, promising to rebuild her: "Help me continue the work, Dan. We can create a new life. (beat) Starting with Meg's heart." (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989, 31).

What's most interesting in regards to the conversation of sexual subtext within this scene is its multidimensionality. The most obvious reading here is, of course, Herbert's attempt to keep his partner close by offering to build him a girlfriend—a sort of literal intermediary in their

relationship. If Herbert can't offer Dan the kind of conventional sexual union he clearly desires, he can at least build something that will, with the added benefit that it furthers his goals and will be totally under his control. But additionally, if we return to our domestic framework, then we must by extension admit that there's something about Herbert's actions here which feel a bit like poking holes in the proverbial condom.

Frankenstein narratives have often held shades of parental allegory—something stemming from author Mary Shelley's personal life. As Steven Lehman puts it rather succinctly in his essay "The Motherless Child in Science Fiction":

> Recent scholarship has come to see Frankenstein as a 'birth myth' or 'fantasmagoria of the nursery' (Moers 92, 99) [...] Mary Wollstonecraft died shortly after bringing William Godwin's daughter into the world, and Mary Godwin's own daughter by Percy Shelley died in infancy shortly before she embarked on the writing of *Frankenstein* [...] Is it any wonder that a young woman adrift in the world, twice the victim of reproductive tragedy, would be seeking a kind of 'maternal heartland' (Rubenstein 174) or would be moved to contemplate the horrifying void of its absence? (1992)

However, ever since *Bride of Frankenstein*'s choice to have its title monster be specifically the product of two men's intellectual union against God, readings of Bride characters as specifically the outcome of "ungodly" (read, homosexual) relations in subsequent adaptations have become fairly common. As Benshoff puts it, "[P]erhaps the most obviously queer [sci-fi horror films] are those wherein the homosexual pair set out to procreate without the aid of woman. The act of procreation, read as sex, thus makes this particular formula spectacularly queer." (1997, 49). In a world where homosexual relations are deemed monstrous, where social conventions have cut off all other avenues, the path of least resistance may lead straight to the graveyard. Much like introducing a child or pregnancy into a dwindling relationship, Herbert's building of the Bride is transparently an attempt to refocus Dan's interest back to the home.

As horror is, by its nature, allegorical, meta-text overlays of this sort appear in a verity of different horror media. Probably the most popular, non-sci-fi example would be Anne Rice's *Interview With A Vampire*, wherein the two main male vampires "sire" a young dying girl in an attempt to reinvigorate their rocky relationship. However, they end up missing the forest for the trees; in their haste to, essentially, have a baby to save their marriage, they end up trapping what will eventually grow to be an ancient consciousness in the eternal body of a child (Rice 1976). As protagonist Louis De Point du Lac puts it, "[I began] ignoring all other duties of the role that [my daughter] once mocked me for—the unhappy housewife," (Anderson, Reid and Bogosian 2022).

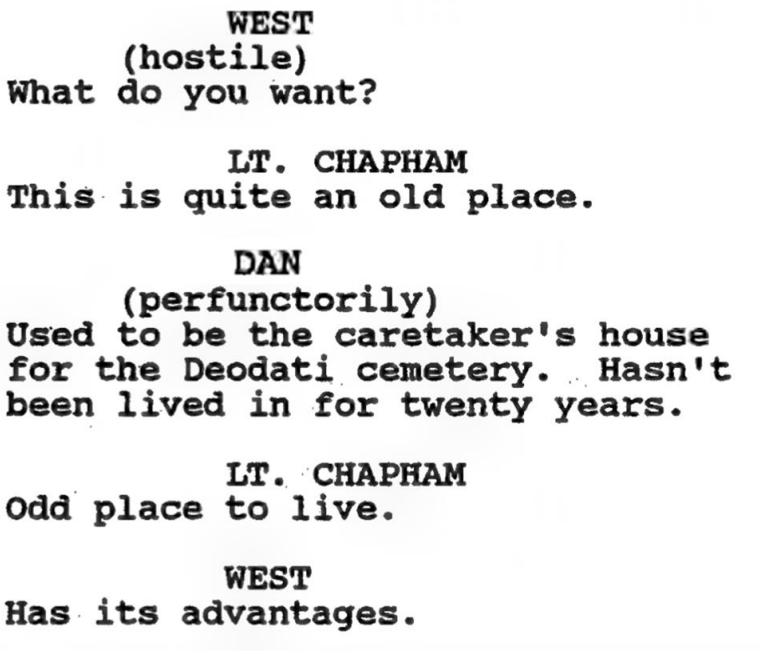
Further belaboring the subtext, Herbert tenderly holds Meg's heart out to Dan, slipping it into his hands with all the care and support of someone passing an infant child. As Dan stares down at the heart in almost a stupor, Herbert rushes over to his makeshift operating table, removing the bloodied sheets and replaces them with pristine white ones—preparing the proverbial marriage bed by removing the evidence of untoward stains. Bruce Abbott points out the obvious during the scene's commentary track: "This really borders on being sexual for Herbert," (Combs and Abbott [2002]).

Figure 42. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

Othering and Possessiveness

This strangely tender scene is interrupted by the arrival of a police officer—the timing almost comedic, as Herbert is in the middle of assuring Dan that "the police will never come here," when he's cut off by the sound of their front door's buzzer (Yuzna 1990).

The sequence where both men are questioned by a police lieutenant is notable largely as one of our clearest windows into how Dan and Herbert now interact with the outside world. The officer questions them about their strange living situation—not just two younger, well-employed bachelors choosing to live together, but specifically in a dilapidated home by a cemetery.



WEST
(hostile)
What do you want?

LT. CHAPHAM
This is quite an old place.

DAN
(perfunctorily)
Used to be the caretaker's house for the Deodati cemetery. Hasn't been lived in for twenty years.

LT. CHAPHAM
Odd place to live.

WEST
Has its advantages.

Figure 43. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

It also reestablishes and expands upon a thread seen in Rovin's novelization of the first film—that of Herbert West's hatred of police, itself a subtly queer-coded trait. Briefly returning to "Parasites and Perverts," Halberstam draws overt links between the treatment of otherized racial minorities in horror and the treatment of queer people in horror, what they refer to as the "gothicization" of communities: "European anti-Semitism and American racism towards black Americans are precisely Gothic discourses given over to the making monstrous of particular kinds of bodies," (2006, 77). While Halberstam does make a point to differentiate between how horror and the gothic portray things like anti-Black racism and homophobia, there are undeniable connective dimensions therein.

Herbert West and Dan Cain have become the Othered monsters, the outsiders literally living in a house by the cemetery. While they both hold respectable jobs as doctors, their nighttime extracurriculars give their lives (particularly Dan's) a bipartite quality that feels almost

reminiscent of Jekyll and Hyde. By day they appear as upstanding, respectable members of society, by night they are perverse ghouls—living outside of town, stealing body parts from the dead. In many ways, the two men's choice to live together in this manner is framed as equally monstrous, or at the very least, as an extension of their monstrosity. And in the same way that monsters are often under threat—from institutions and individuals who do not understand them, from pitchfork-wielding townsfolk—so too are queer individuals subject to similar forms of haranguing and oppression, often at the hands of government bodies and/or the police. West has a right to be warry—on several fronts.

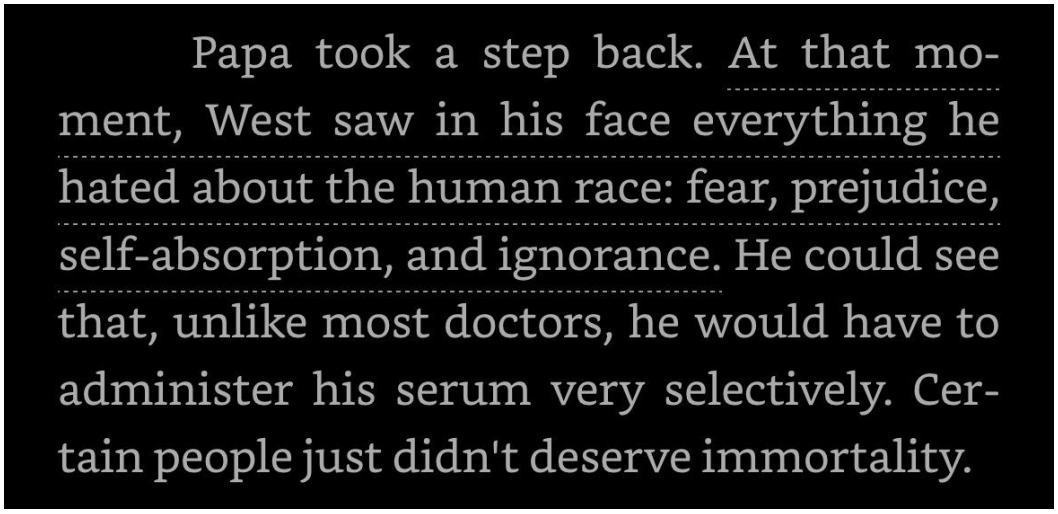
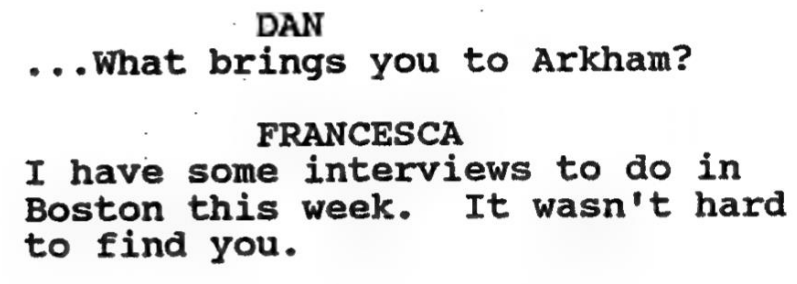

Papa took a step back. At that moment, West saw in his face everything he hated about the human race: fear, prejudice, self-absorption, and ignorance. He could see that, unlike most doctors, he would have to administer his serum very selectively. Certain people just didn't deserve immortality.

Figure 44. Re-Animator novelization (Rovin 1986, 148)

While the two men are eventually able to gray-rock and misdirect the officer away from their home, the newfound elation brought on by their decision to build a bride is short lived—as Francesca Danelli, the Italian war correspondent from the film's opening, is reintroduced into Dan's life—humorously, while Dan and Herbert are in the middle of stealing a body from the hospital. As the two men attempted to make a discrete exit by putting a woman's corpse in a wheelchair and acting as though she's a patient, Dan is surprised by the arrival of Francesca's

dog. As he sees her for the first time, Dan awkwardly looks over to an indignant Herbert, before walking ahead. On the commentary track, the two leads laugh: “You have to ask permission!” (Combs and Abbott [2002]).



DAN
...What brings you to Arkham?

FRANCESCA
I have some interviews to do in Boston this week. It wasn't hard to find you.

Figure 45. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

The two share a flirtation that is as ungainly as it is brief. At one point, Herbert sidles up to Dan during their conversation and says, “Careful Dan, don't let the little head rule the big one,” which, even for Herbert West, reads as an overly possessive warning (Yuzna 1990).

Dan invites Francesca over for dinner that night, but later in the evening we see him get sidetracked working on the bride with Herbert. The two men bicker over the half-formed corpse:

> HERBERT: Careful not to use too much of that, we don’t want any premature reanimation.
> DAN: [sarcastically] Thanks, I've never done this before. (Yuzna 1990)

Once again, while discussing “premature reanimation”, as the bickering couple try to create life together, Dan ends up getting spurted in the face with blood.

The entire sequence has a heady, homoerotic air to it. When Francesca shows up at the door, Dan quickly strips out of his bloodied scrubs and into a clean button down, easily switching between one life and the other, it would seem. This choice to show off the fact that actor Bruce Abbott bulked up considerably since the first film likely did not go unnoticed by male gay audiences.

Even Jeffrey Combs responds to the lingering shot of Dan's torso with, "Oh, look at that. You are buff, babe," (Combs and Abbott [2002]).

The domestic framework extends herein too—as Dan and Francesca make dinner together upstairs, Herbert, still in the basement lab, stares petulantly up at the ceiling. As the actors put it:

> Abbott: I think it's interesting that Herbert is insanely jealous.
> Combs: Well... he's irritated that you are so easily taken away from the work.
> Abbott: Yeah well, some psychologists may [laughs] care to go deeper.
> (Combs and Abbott [2002])

Til Death Do Us Part

If Herbert West is to be read as a housewife, then it's the perpetually unsatisfied kind—a woman who's made peace with her husband's flagrant infidelities. Or at least, what Herbert seems to perceive as infidelities. It should be noted here that this is fairly in line with Lovecraft's own depictions of marriage and domestic union, which ranged largely from neutral to negative—something many biographers believe was influenced by early memories of his parents' marriage, as well as experiences in his own. In his writing of Lovecraft's early life, Peter Cannon describes the effective dissolution of his parents' union thusly:

> When he was two his father, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, was declared insane and committed to a sanitarium, where he died five years later of "paresis". [...] Sarah Susan Phillips Lovecraft left the Boston area, where they had been in residence since their marriage, and returned with her small son to Providence, Rhode Island. (1989, 23)

"Paresis" is a form of partial muscle paralysis, which can be brought on by syphilis. Archived medical records from Butler Hospital, where Winfield Lovecraft was held, indeed indicate that complications brought on by syphilis was the cause of his death. As there is no record of Mrs. Lovecraft ever contracting the disease, it is widely believed by biographers and historians that Winfield, a traveling salesman by trade, caught it through an extramarital affair.

Undeniably, these early memories of his parents' strange marriage had a profound impact on his view of the institution, as well as himself as a person and the world around him. Lovecraft would vehemently deny his father's syphilis in adulthood, seemingly believing that his mental breakdown and subsequent health issues had been caused by a different, more benign disease. However, Cannon and various other Lovecraft biographers have expressed some doubt as to Lovecraft's ignorance on the subject—given that “[a] number of his better tales deal with hereditary degeneracy and the coupling of human beings with monsters," (1989, 23).

Likewise, Lovecraft’s own marriage to journalist and businesswoman Sonia Greene was rife difficulties and unconventionality. According to Greene, Lovecraft struggled immensely to take any sort of initiative in the relationship, an internal passivity she blamed on him having been coddled by his mother and mother's family. After just a year of marriage, Greene moved to the Midwest for career opportunities, while Lovecraft stayed in New York. While the two would remain married on paper, emotionally the relationship was effectively over.. Sometime during the early 1930s, Greene would propose the idea of an amicable divorce. Lovecraft agreed and assured her that he would file the necessary paperwork, though he never did. Greene would not discover this until many years later, after Lovecraft's death in 1937.

While Lovecraft certainly didn't intend for Doctor Herbert West and his unnamed assistant to be read as a homosexual couple—Lovecraft hated homosexuals about as much as he hated non-white people, Jews, and immigrants—there is certainly something to be said about how he characterizes their dynamic as two people grimly devoted to each other despite all detriments: a marriage of sorts. And that idea, this shambling corpse of a domestic union, does bleed over into the films’ depiction of Dan Cain and Herbert West’s dynamic.

Sex By Proxy

We see that Dan and Francesca have retreated to the bedroom—both fully undressed, Dan strokes his hand over her breast, whispering “So warm...” (Yuzna 1990). Francesca, is here, alive, in the present moment —a complete and utter contrast both to Herbert and the half-assembled woman in their basement. The film cuts to the open door of Dan’s bedroom, and we see Herbert standing outside, watching them.

> CAMERA PUSHES PAST THEM, TO THE DOORWAY. Standing in the shadows, just outside the door, IS HERBERT WEST ~ WATCHING. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989, 48)

He observes them for a moment before walking away, gingerly rubbing at his hip. There are both many and few ways to interpret this scene—few in the most literal capacity; it is a scene of voyeurism. But many in how we interpret Herbert as a character herein. On the film's commentary track, the actors have this exchange:

> Combs: And now we’re gonna cut to... who’s listening? That’s right, Herbert is!
> Abbott: [laughs] Not only “listening.”
> Combs: Well... he doesn't understand what’s going on—
> Abbott: Oh, of course he does!
> Combs: No, he doesn't!
> Abbott: Are you kidding me?
> Combs: That’s what this whole moment is about right here!
> Abbott: So Psycho—
> Combs: What is going on—
> Abbott: Unbelievably Anthony Perkins.
> Combs: Why don't I have that in my life?!
> Abbott: Yeah, well, [Norman Bates] did taxidermy, you reanimate. It's the mommy thing. (Combs and Abbott [2002])

The discussion is illuminating—and humorous in an ironic way. Perkins’s homosexuality was not widely known at the time of this recording, and the specific invoking of reanimation in relation to taxidermy—“the mommy thing”—once again steers us back into the realm of the domestic: Norman Bates as a man impersonating his own mother as an expression of unfulfilled

desires, Herbert West as the allegorical mother who brings life into the world through unnatural means.

It's not an uncommon interpretation of the scene that Herbert's voyeurism is masturbatory in nature, and/or that there's some degree of emotional yearning taking place. But what Combs seems to imply is either that Herbert's feelings for Dan are completely divorced from any sense of sexual arousal, herein or otherwise, or that Herbert recognizes he can't give Dan the conventional relationship that on some level, he knows Dan wants. In Yuzna's Q&A, he echoes this sentiment, saying "[…] for West, science is sex," (2021).

Reading Herbert West as asexual or aromantic is, in my opinion, a perfectly valid interpretation of the text—justified not only the characters actions, but by the strong likelihood that Lovecraft's own refusal to "take any sort of initiative" in his relationship was similarly, potentially, a product of latent asexuality. Like sexuality as a whole, asexuality and aromanticism are spectrums—something the vast majority of organizations dedicated to providing information about/to individuals curious on the matter, like the Asexual Visibility and Education Awareness Network and The National Library of Medicine, will readily discuss.

> It is not as simple to dichotomize between experiencing or not experiencing romantic attraction, as many [individuals on the aromantic spectrum] have broad perspectives toward romance (often ranging between repulsion, lack of interest, and confusion), or experience romantic attraction under specific conditions. (Fowler, et al. 2024)

However, with the exception of Combs, who does seem to have put much thought into the nuance of Herbert's identity, it unfortunately feels as though some of these comments (particularly Yuzna's) come across less as an attempt to deeply engage with the concept and more to disregard the idea that Dan and Herbert's relationship may have any "legitimate" sexual tension.

Unbeknownst to either man, the police officer who questioned them earlier has broken into their home. He confronts Herbert, demanding to be let into the basement lab. Herbert allows him in, though quickly kills the man in "self-defense." Dan gets interrupted mid-coitus to, once again, help Herbert clean up a body. As Herbert must once again convince his partner to help him perform an incredibly ill-advised reanimation, the two actors joke about how "Lady Macbeth" he's behaving. Herbert unholsters the officer's gun, handing it over to Dan, who takes it begrudgingly.

> Combs: See, but I trust you enough! I trust you enough.
> Abott: Oh boy. That's an honor? (Combs and Abbott [2002])

Even as Dan's beautiful new girlfriend waits upstairs in his bedroom, he can't pull away from the lab. The reanimation of the police officer is successful, but like many of the reanimated, he comes back in an agitated, angered state.

The officer's reanimation immediately transitions into a fight between the three men—the scene juxtaposing shots of Francesca calling out for Dan with Dan calling out for Herbert. As the police lieutenant tears his way through the house, he ends up accidentally but brutally killing Francesca's dog, which, in the commotion, Herbert brings back down to the lab. The horrifically disastrous evening prompts Francesca to explode at Dan.

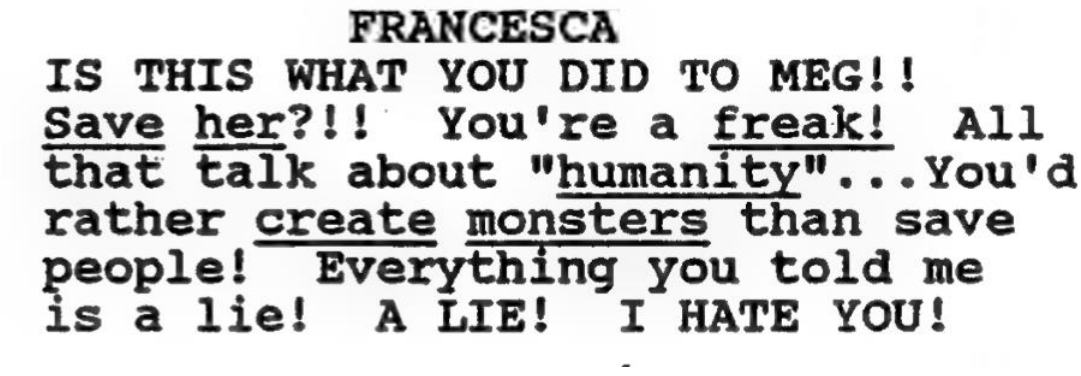

FRANCESCA
IS THIS WHAT YOU DID TO MEG!!
Save her?!! You're a freak! All
that talk about "humanity"...You'd
rather create monsters than save
people! Everything you told me
is a lie! A LIE! I HATE YOU!

Figure 46. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

Interesting, in the film's final cut, several few sentences from this paragraph were edited out—the primary section remaining being Francesca calling Dan a "freak." This is immediately followed by Herbert attempting to reassure Dan that he's better off without her—the sentiment does not seem to improve his partner's mood.

Because I'm Playing Your Song, Baby

If the previous film saw Dan actively choosing to ignore the concerns of his primary female partner and turn to Herbert willingly, this film sees the women in Dan's life "abandon" him, leaving him with only Herbert West to turn to. The subsequent scene shows Dan going to visit Gloria. He attempts to confess how much she reminds him of Meg (another quiet moment of selfishness from Dan) when she begins to flatline mid-conversation. Dan calls for nurses and a crash cart but is too emotionally agitated to do much else. When he attempts to instigate emergency surgery, he mis-cuts, causing him to once again be splashed in the face with blood. Herbert is forced to take over as Dan enters an almost catatonic state. When Herbert calls time of death, Dan begins panicking.

Dan stands up, soaked in blood.

DAN
NO! NOT AGAIN!!

Figure 47. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

Standing off to the side, completely covered in blood, Herbert steps away from the nurses and tenderly, gently directs Dan to go home. Combs's acting in this scene is noticeably softer than even the other scenes with his and Dan's more "tender" interactions. There is a gentleness here, a sense of history and understanding.

Figure 48. "Go home. ...Go. Home." (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

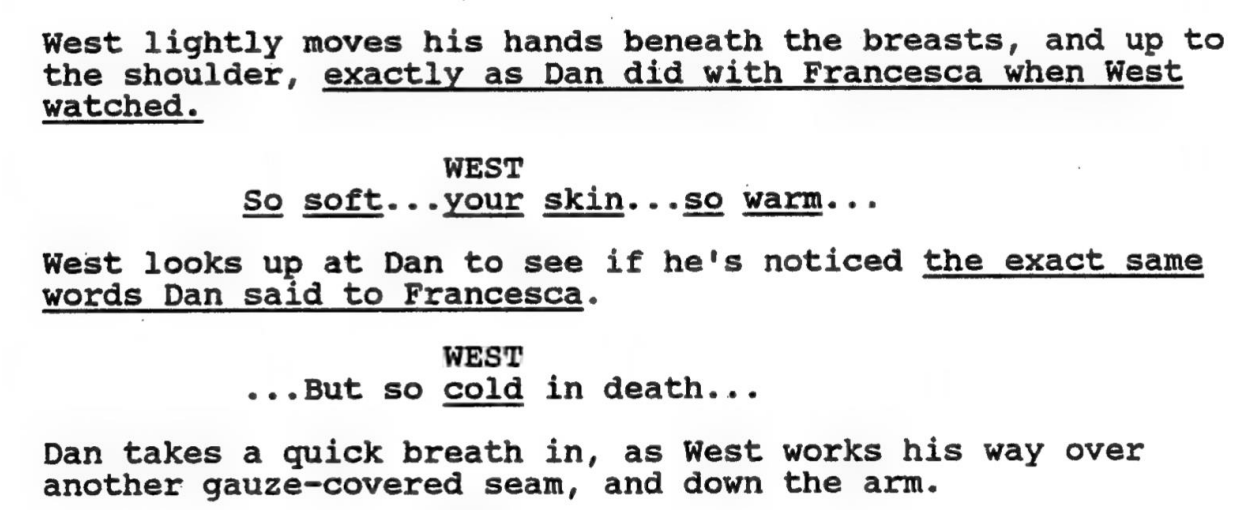
However, there's a grimmer side to this interaction. Once Dan and the nurses are gone, we see Herbert clearly planning to do *something* with Gloria's body—he does, after all, know his partner very well.

Up until this point in the film, the partially assembled bride hasn't had a head. Later that night, Herbert brings Dan down into the basement, revealing to him that he's stolen Gloria's from the hospital morgue, and plans to use it for their bride. The sight causes Dan to collapse—as Herbert rushes over to collect him, the actors on the film's commentary track have this deeply illuminating exchange:

> Abbott: Oh, look at this false sincerity.
> Combs: It's not false.
> Abbott: Why does Dan buy this?
> Combs: It's not false!
> [beat]
> Combs: Because I'm playing your song, baby.
> Abott: Yeah. (Combs and Abbott [2002])

There is some degree of debate amongst both fans and academics who have covered this film, as to whether Herbert West's closeness with Dan is entirely a product of manipulation or of genuine attraction. However, this exchange seems to indicate that it's a little of both. Herbert is very aware that what he's doing to Dan is manipulative, his time with the other man has taught him how exactly to stick his fingers in Dan's brain and push on all of his softest, most traumatized spots. He knows what will trigger, what will cause panic, or even emotional catatonia. But he only knows these things because he has bothered to extensively learn them, the lines between manipulation and genuine care seemingly having blurred as Herbert bothered to put in the time and research to learning whatever his partners "song" is.

Herbert proceeds to describe every disparate part their bride is made of—an action revealing, both in how it elucidates the time and thought West put into finding body parts he thinks will appeal specifically to Dan, as well as the fact he knows Dan in such an intimate capacity as to determine what kind of legs or breasts he finds attractive on women.



West lightly moves his hands beneath the breasts, and up to the shoulder, exactly as Dan did with Francesca when West watched.

WEST
So soft...your skin...so warm...

West looks up at Dan to see if he's noticed the exact same words Dan said to Francesca.

WEST
...But so cold in death...

Dan takes a quick breath in, as West works his way over another gauze-covered seam, and down the arm.

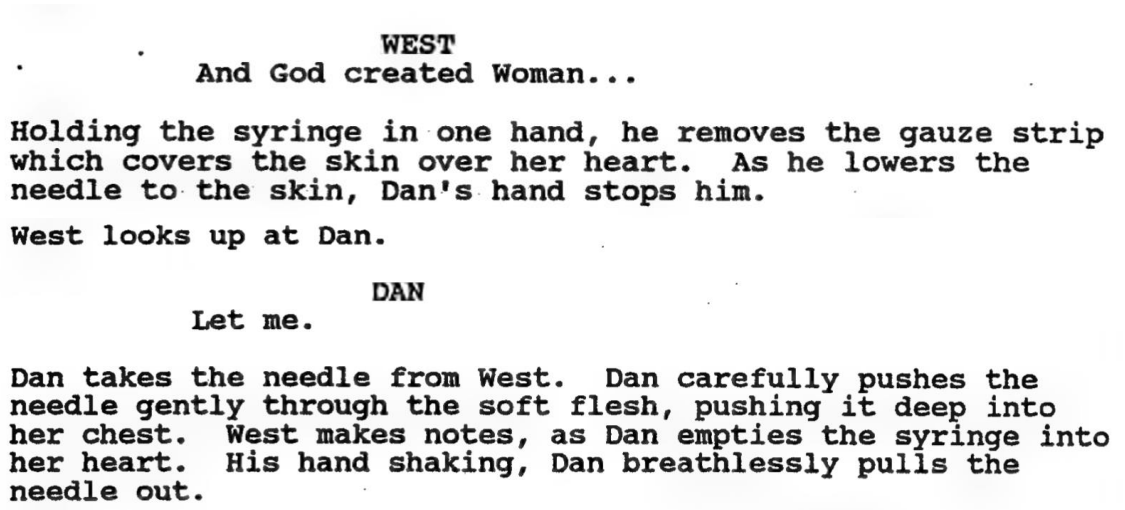
Figure 49. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

The sequence is both seductive and awkward—there is a notably alien quality to the way Herbert West describes women's bodies, a sort of uncanny perversion. Like someone who has perceived others discuss what they find attractive in women enough to parrot it but doesn't fundamentally understand the impetus behind the sentiment. Importantly though, what fully sells the pitch is Herbert frequently invoking the pain these women, these disparate body parts, faced in their lives, including Gloria and Meg. Herbert understands that Dan, on some level, still wants to see himself as a savior. A romantic hero. And that idea is what rallies Dan.

The two men enter into the final stage of preparing their bride, though even as Dan and Herbert seemingly managed to find some common ground, cracks are beginning to show. Literal cracks in the walls, the sounds of *something* from the ancient family crypt adjoining their basement, possibly trying to get in? Cracks in the narrative itself—a running subplot throughout the film see's the return of Doctor Hill's severed head, brought back to life once again by an opportunistic pathologist. There is an ever-growing, ever-encroaching sense of dread as the film builds to its climax. It's almost as though we, the audience, can see the foundation on which Dan and

Herbert's relationship is built—how unsteady it is, how fundamentally rotten, how close to collapse.

When it finally comes time to inject reagent into the bride, Dan insists on being the one to do it.



WEST
And God created Woman...

Holding the syringe in one hand, he removes the gauze strip which covers the skin over her heart. As he lowers the needle to the skin, Dan's hand stops him.

West looks up at Dan.

DAN
Let me.

Dan takes the needle from West. Dan carefully pushes the needle gently through the soft flesh, pushing it deep into her chest. West makes notes, as Dan empties the syringe into her heart. His hand shaking, Dan breathlessly pulls the needle out.

Figure 50. (Yuzna, Keith and Fry 1989)

In context, this is very clearly Dan being overprotective of Meg's heart, the last whole vestige of her remaining. But the almost surreally shocked look Herbert gives in this moment seems to indicate that he interprets this situation as Dan finally, completely giving himself over to Herbert's life work. If we follow the metaphor of procreation, it is the final, ultimate consent, the act of impregnation.

Figure 51. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

Next Comes The Baby Carriage

As the two men wait for the bride to come fully to life, they're interrupted by a knocking on the door. Herbert chooses to leave Dan with the bride, going upstairs to check the noise. Unbeknownst to either of them, multiple threats are converging on the house—the severed head of Hill with various reanimated persons in tow, the reanimated officer, and of course, Francesca, back to apologize to Dan.

Back in the basement lab, the bride (played by actress Kathleen Kinmont, who of course also plays Gloria) suddenly comes to life—though it’s nothing like Elsa Lanchester's eyes opening from behind a mask of bandages. Here, lying on the table, she silently awakens, so quiet and undramatic that Dan doesn't even initially notice. When she begins gasping for air, he leans over her and begins to perform CPR. It's a direct inversion of *Re-Animator'*s climax, where Dan is unable to similarly revive Meg after her attack. Here, it only takes a few breaths before she starts

to breathe normally, staring up into Dan's eyes in a dreamy, romantic sort of way as he puts a hand under her head and helps her sit up.

Figure 52. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

The scene is darkly romantic in an almost whimsical way. As Dan helps the bride up, the music swells orchestrally, odd for a series known for its blaring synth score. The lab is awash in deep blue and green tones, and the white mesh covering the bride falls around her to create a sort of artfully styled dress.

As the bride stands, Dan helps her take her first few steps. Kinmont mimics Lanchester's baby duckling motions—though here there is a notable stiffness, a painful, halting quality. It visibly hurts for this bride to move. Illuminated by bright flashes of lightning from an oncoming storm, she takes everything in. Dan steps closer, directing her look at him. In the close up, we can see her eyes are filled with tears. He whispers, "You're alive," his tone shaky but assured, before collapsing in front of her, wrapping his arms around her waist. She looks up and whispers, "Alive..." as we hear the sounds of rolling thunder (Yuzna 1990).

Figure 53. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

As Herbert attempts to defend himself from the various threats, Dan brings the bride upstairs for him to see.

Figure 54. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

In the midst of the chaos, we get a brief moment of familial reunion between the three. Herbert approaches the bride with something like awe, gently taking her hand. She nervously backs away, moving closer to Dan, and Herbert indignantly responds, "I made you!" (Yuzna 1990). As Combs and Abbott put it:

> Abbott: Perhaps as warm and fuzzy as Herbert's ever felt.
> Combs: [laughs] Well, wouldn't you? And she pulls away it's like "the baby wants him." (Combs and Abbott [2002])

While Herbert's feelings for the bride are depicted herein as decidedly paternalistic, Dan seems to still predominantly conceptualize her as being Meg—or at least, a version of Meg. As Francesca re-enters the scene calling for Dan, he looks up with an almost hazy, starry gaze and exclaims "She's alive!" (Yuzna 1990). The group are forced back down into the basement, where Francesca confronts Herbert about the bride. Here, we get arguably the film's most memorable exchanges:

> Herbert: We created a life!
> Francesca: ...You made her?
> Herbert: Yes! [grabs her arm] Dead pieces of this! With my hands, I created what no man's mind or woman's womb could ever hope to achieve!
> Francesca: This is blasphemy!
> Herbert: Blasphemy?! Before what god? A god repulsed by the miserable humanity he created in his own image? I'll not be shackled by the failure of your god! The only "blasphemy" is to wallow in insignificance! I have taken the refuse of your god's failure and I have triumphed. There [gestures to The Bride], is my creation! (Combs and Abbott [2002])

<u>Motherhood and Transgender Creation</u>

This exchange is of particular interest in discussing these films' relationship to gender through a distinctly queer lense.

Much like the rich history of homoerotic or homosexual subtext in science fiction horror, there is too a history of transgender subtext in science fiction horror. As critic and journalist Emily St. James puts rather succinctly it in the docuseries *Queer for Fear*, when discussing Universal's

Frankenstein, "There is this element of science helping you find your true form that is not... not trans, but also society regards that science as ghoulish. Every day, trans people are playing God for themselves. They are saying, *I'm going to reanimate the parts of myself that everyone has told me should be dead,*" (Peirce 2022, 08:31).

We have repeatedly explored the framework of Herbert West as an allegorical housewife—Herbert West as someone suffering quietly with the inability to give their partner what they want, in this case a conventional household. But lines like "I created what no man's mind or woman's womb could ever hope to achieve!" suggest a person who perceives themself as above gender, as having transcended a sense of gender. "A god repulsed by the miserable humanity he created in his own image? I'll not be shackled by the failure of your god!" suggests someone who views their body's design as a failure—and who has overcome that failure, become their own God. I believe that Susan Stryker, in her 1994 essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," put it best: "The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that which it was born" (1994, 238).

Moreover, while Herbert was not written to be transgender, trans audiences tend to resonate with characters who struggle to fit within conventional definitions of gender. In men, this is often characters considered unmanly due to body type, interests, and/or sexuality. Herbert, allegorically "unmanned" by his latent queer desire, his petite frame, and his single-minded obsession with his work, is a prime example of such a character. Of course, people would read this character as transgender. Of course they would.

Francesca attempts to break through to Dan, to remind him that this person is not Meg. But even her attempts to get physically close seem to spook the skittish bride, and the two women end up

in a physical altercation. As Herbert holds him back from getting involved, he says to Dan, “Your girlfriend doesn't stand a chance—our girl is superior.” (Yuzna 1990). The combination of Francesca’s protestations and Herbert’s unambiguously paternal, possessive language seems to knock Dan out of his stupor. He pulls the bride off of Francesca, shouting at her. She looks at him, confused and in obvious pain, parroting Herbert’s earlier line—“You made me...” The camera slowly pans up her body—what would otherwise be a seductive or erotic shot, is instead highly off-putting (Yuzna 1990).

Figure 55. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

In some ways it's as though we the audience are being punished for our voyeurism—the bride’s body is an utter mess of gore, the skin covering her breasts and genitals discolored and waxy-looking. Even by the standards of this series, it looks notably repulsive. In escalating the sexual body horror this way, it feels almost as though the movie points an accusatory finger at anyone who uncritically viewed or even enjoyed Meg’s rape scene from the first film.

The bride asks Dan gingerly, “Don’t you want me?” Dan responds, “I don’t want your body.” The insinuation being that what he wants is Meg, or Gloria, or any of the women making up this bride, hale and whole. He wants normalcy. As always, the baby does not fix the marriage. Of course, the bride herself cannot understand this—she was, after all, built for Dan. The inherent ugly subtext of all Bride characters is made manifest herein. She looks at him incredulously and screams, “Then what do you want?!” before physically pulling her still beating heart out of her chest, holding it up for Dan to see, “Is this what you want?!”, as she begins to fall apart (Yuzna 1990).

Figure 56. (Yuzna, Bride of Re-Animator 1990)

As the bride disintegrates before their disbelieving eyes, all hell breaks loose. Dr. Hill’s reanimated henchmen finally manage to break into the lab, forcing Dan, Francesca, and Herbert back through a hole in the wall, to the crypt adjoining their basement. Therein, it’s revealed that Herbert has been storing all of the body part amalgams he reanimated. These creatures—as alive as the bride ever was—do not seem to evoke the same sense of paternal pride in Herbert. The bride served as symbol of Dan and Herbert’s partnership, a “love child” of sorts. As Dan had no

hand in the creation of these amalgamations of body parts, Herbert has no warm feelings attached to them; they are, as he calls them, his "rejects," (Yuzna 1990). With the antagonistic forces combined, the three are cornered as the crypt's ceiling begins to collapse. While Dan and Francesca are able to escape, Herbert is left buried under the rubble—the film ending on a shot of Meg's heart, slowly ceasing to beat. Though Herbert West seems, once again, to have perished, the character would later return in a much later sequel, *Beyond Reanimator*—without Dan.

To briefly return to this chapter's opening, while *Bride of Re-Animator* is certainly regarded as the weaker of the two films, it is notable as, for now and likely ever, the definitive conclusion of Dan Cain's narrative. And while certainly not perfect, it does take many nobly big swings. As I previously stated, I believe that some of the film's strange tackiness is part of why it's so beloved, why some fans love it more than its undeniably better-constructed predecessor. It's attempts to (somewhat) more intentionally explore queerness, while certainly not perfect, have resonated with queer audiences.

Second Interstitial: Subsequent Adaptations and Influences

What we have already examined the legacy of the Re-Animmator films within the specific context of fandom and fan engagement, I do believe it's prudent here to discuss their influence on subsequent films, particularly within the science fiction and medical horror supplements—particularly in regards to its depictions of queerness. The film's depictions of queerness, of transgressive intimacy, its grotesque camp sensibilities, have echoed even into the modern day.

Frankenhooker (1990)

Produced almost simultaneously with *Bride of Re-Animator*, *Frankenhooker* is another cult classic anchored on the *Frankenstein* mythos. Directed and co-written by horror comedy legend Frank Henenlotter, best known for his 1982 movie *Basket Case*, the film follows a man attempting to bring his fiancé back from the dead, by killing sex workers and repurposing their bodies. Comparable in its aesthetic and tone to the Re-Animator series, both blending camp humor and grotesque spectacle, both films additionally take unique approaches to themes of gender and the female form. *Frankenhooker*'s protagonist, Jeffrey Franken, is madly in love with his departed fiancé Elizabeth—but he's also highly discerning of the body parts he utilizes to bring her back. We see comical scenes of him going over different pairs of breasts and legs like he's picking out decor for his living room. Jeffrey is willing to kill for his partner, but he also wouldn't mind if she were a little skinnier. A bit more conventionally attractive. Had better tits. It feels highly akin to the judgmental tone of *Bride of Reanimator*'s camera, slowly tracking its way up Gloria's disfigured, mangled, yet still eroticized body. At the end of the film, Jeffrey is killed by a vengeful pimp, and the newly reanimated Elizabeth brings him back by, using his own notes—in doing so, building him a new body also made from female sex workers. It's a karmic twist that's more than a little transphobic, but despite that, many trans horror fans hold the

film in fairly high regard. The movie ends before we can really see Jeffrey react to his new body, and lacking any definitive picture of how Jeffrey and Elizabeth's strange, undead relationship will look like going forward, the audience can easily read something more overtly queer, albeit imperfect and rough around the edges, into the text. In many ways, *Frankenhooker* and the *Re-Animator* series feel like cousins of each other, complementary works.

Victor Frankenstein (2015)

Skipping forward a somewhat considerably amount, we have the 2015 Universal Pictures film *Victor Frankenstein*, an attempt on the company's part to reboot their iconic *Universal Monsters* shared universe. The film was not tremendously well regarded upon release, and even now holds a 26% on review aggregate site Rotten Tomatoes. However, the movie is notable to this discussion as it seems to draw heavily on the first *Re-Animator* film. The movie essentially serves as a character deconstruction of Victor Frankenstein, pulling heavily from a wide array of depictions. Our protagonist is Igor, the composite "doctor's assistant" character. As opposed to some versions where Igor is mentally challenged, here he and Frankenstein have a more equitable relationship, distinctly partners. As such, Dan and Herbert serve as a sort of model to work from—one of the few popular depictions of this specific type of mad scientist/assistant dynamic, where the mad scientist himself is occasionally (though not always) in a more submissive position to their assistant. Victor Frankenstein is, in this adaptation, sardonic, emotionally removed, and aloof—but he quickly develops a highly codependent relationship with Igor. Like *Re-Animator*, the two central characters' relationship can be tracked by an increasing penchant for physical contact, as well as often emotionally charged shot composition. Igor feels indebted to Victor, who, at the film's opening, saves him from a life as an abused circus performer. However, as Igor falls in love and starts a relationship with a woman, he's

increasingly pulled away from their shared work. Similar to Dan and Herbert, it is a dynamic strained by the assistant's desire for a "normal" life.

Additionally, as a fun sort of shout-out, the first thing the two reanimate together is an animal—a monkey specifically named Gordon.

Lisa Frankenstein (2024)

While the *Re-Animator* series and *Lisa Frankenstein* are markedly different reinterpretations of the *Frankenstein* mythos, one cannot divorce the latter from the former. Written by Diablo Cody, (*Juno*, *Jennifer's Body*), after a hiatus from filmmaking, the film is an intentionally campy work which draws heavily on previous camp *Frankenstein* adaptations in its exploration of gender, reanimation, and of course, the construction of an "ideal" companion.

Here, our protagonist and title character, Lisa, ends up unintentionally reanimating the body of a young man who's been deceased for over a hundred years. As she realizes that she can make him increasingly more human by attaching new body parts to him, the pair set off on a journey to kill those who have wronged her and steal their disparate parts. In many ways, this is a narrative vehicle for exploring both how young women who exist outside of societal norms are treated, but it also serves to turn the sexual body horror of films like *Bride of Re-Animator* and *Frankenhooker* on its head—the film climaxing with a teen boy who aggrieved Lisa getting his penis cut off and "repurposed."

Many of the film's references to the *Re-Animator* series are aesthetic in nature, but there is some exploration of the mad scientist/assistant dynamic herein as well. Lisa's monster (we never learn his name) holds the unique position of being both Creature and Assistant. Notably, as the

character gets increasingly more human, he's increasingly styled similarly to Bruce Abbott in *Bride of Re-Animator*.

Figure 57. (Williams 2024)

There is a case to be made that Lisa is changing her monster by fostering their companionship as much as by literally physically repairing him over the course of the movie—to extend the metaphor backward, Herbert West is "building a monster" through his relationship with Dan as much as he is physically building his own creatures.

Frankenstein (2025)

The most recent film with the mark of *Re-Animator*'s influence is Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein.* Despite being a straightforward adaptation of the original Mary Shelley novel, the film contains numerous visual and narrative references to the *Re-Animato*r series, particularly *Bride of Re-Animator*. Most notably, Victor Frankenstein repeats Herbert West's "I made you!" (directed at the Bride) as a phrase of reassurance to his newly created creature (Yuzna, Bride of

Re-Animator 1990, del Toro 2025). It's a moment which feels as though it ties influences together in a neat, succinct line. The original Universal Frankenstein, to the *Re-Animator* series, to this new *Frankenstein*, specifically, in regards to the themes of allegorical parenthood.

Conclusion

The success of *Re-Animator* and *Bride of Re-Animator* would lead to the third, and, to date, final film in the series, *Beyond Re-Animator* (2004). As early as the recording of the actor's commentary track for *Bride*, the two leads speculate about what a hypothetical third sequel would look like:

> Combs: See I think in a third Re-Animator, it's Herbert versus...
> Abbott: The madness of Dan. (Combs and Abbott [2002])

Sadly, this wouldn't come to pass, as Bruce Abbott would not appear in *Beyond Re-Animator*. Early drafts of the script did include Dan Cain more overtly, but, as reviewer Lauren Coates put it:

> "Dan is written out of the film via an offscreen bombshell: Dan turned Herbert in to the police and testified against him to ensure he went to prison. It's a bleak and drastic turn to explain Dan's unfortunate absence, but also fits morbidly into the idea of a possible pseudo-romantic nature to their relationship: some kind of epic, Shakespearian betrayal to end their violent, chaotic partnership," (2023).

The movie is a definite outlier—far and away the worst in terms of quality, disliked by even many die-hard fans for a host of both technical and tonal reasons. While Dan's absence is not an unbelievable culmination of their relationship, it is certainly jarring that it happens entirely off screen. In reality, Brian Yuzna was more upfront—he didn't believe many people would want to see a movie about two middle-aged men (Yuzna, Brian Yuzna's Re-Animator Sequels 2021, 90). This of course seems ridiculous now, as media about older characters, including homosexual characters, are arguably more prominent than ever. But in the early 2000s, when horror franchises like *Saw* were at their height, it was arguably more of a legitimate concern. Still, *Beyond* is undeniably missing something without Dan—in a similar sense as to how the film *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* loses something from the exclusion of Alec Baldwin and Gena Davis's

characters, the Maitlands. There is something to be said for a good every-man. And the first two *Re-Animator* films, which see Dan's fairly realistic transition from a conventional masculine hero into a shambling, codependent wreck, created a highly compelling protagonist and necessary narrative foil for Herbert West. The sudden disappearance of Dan Cain effectively brings the series thematic throughline to a screeching halt. Yet there is something to be said about the weight of absence. Like the old adage says, we don't know what we have until we've lost it. It is easy to see films like the *Re-Animator* series as low brow or "trashy" horror. But over the years, it is clear they have resonated with audiences. The fact that Dan Cain's absence has created such a rift with fans of the first two movies is proof of the impact these films have had. Dan is replaced in *Beyond Re-Animator* with Jamie, a young new protégé of Herbert's (Yuzna 2003). Yet, despite having an almost identical personality to Dan, the effect is not the same. This is because the outcry is not so much with the absence of Dan himself, but with the absence of his and Herbert's dynamic. Ultimately, the plot of these films does not revolve around the development of Herbert's reagent, or Dan's romantic prospects, but around Dan and Herbert's relationship.

I would argue that the absence of this relationship, and the reaction to its absence, indicate that there is something there worth caring about. Something worth looking at, worth poking and prodding and taking note of. And I don't personally believe that would be true were these films simply "trash", lacking in any and all depth. There is an ease to writing off movies like this, as being not worth academic rigor. But I personally believe there is much to find and examine within these films—their resonance with queer audiences, their rich subtext, their intricate interplay of visuals and themes. Stuart Hall once said, "If no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no 'consumption,'" (1980)—it is specifically through the act of interpretation, intellectual

engagement (arguably even love) that the media we engage with is imbued with levels of meaning; and ouroboros-like, only then do we truly, deeply interact with that media. Like Herbert West, we give it life.

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